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The
Second
Century
of
HUMOUR

With Illustrations
by
FOUGASSE
and stories by

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG
WALTER DE LA MARE
SOMERSET MAUGHAM
STEPHEN LEACOCK
CHARLES DICKENS
P. G. WODEHOUSE
STACY AUMONIER
MICHAEL ARLEN
DENIS MACKAIL
JAMES THURBER
CLARENCE DAY
W. W. JACOBS
A. A. MILNE
H. G. WELLS
IAN HAY
"SAKI"
etc.

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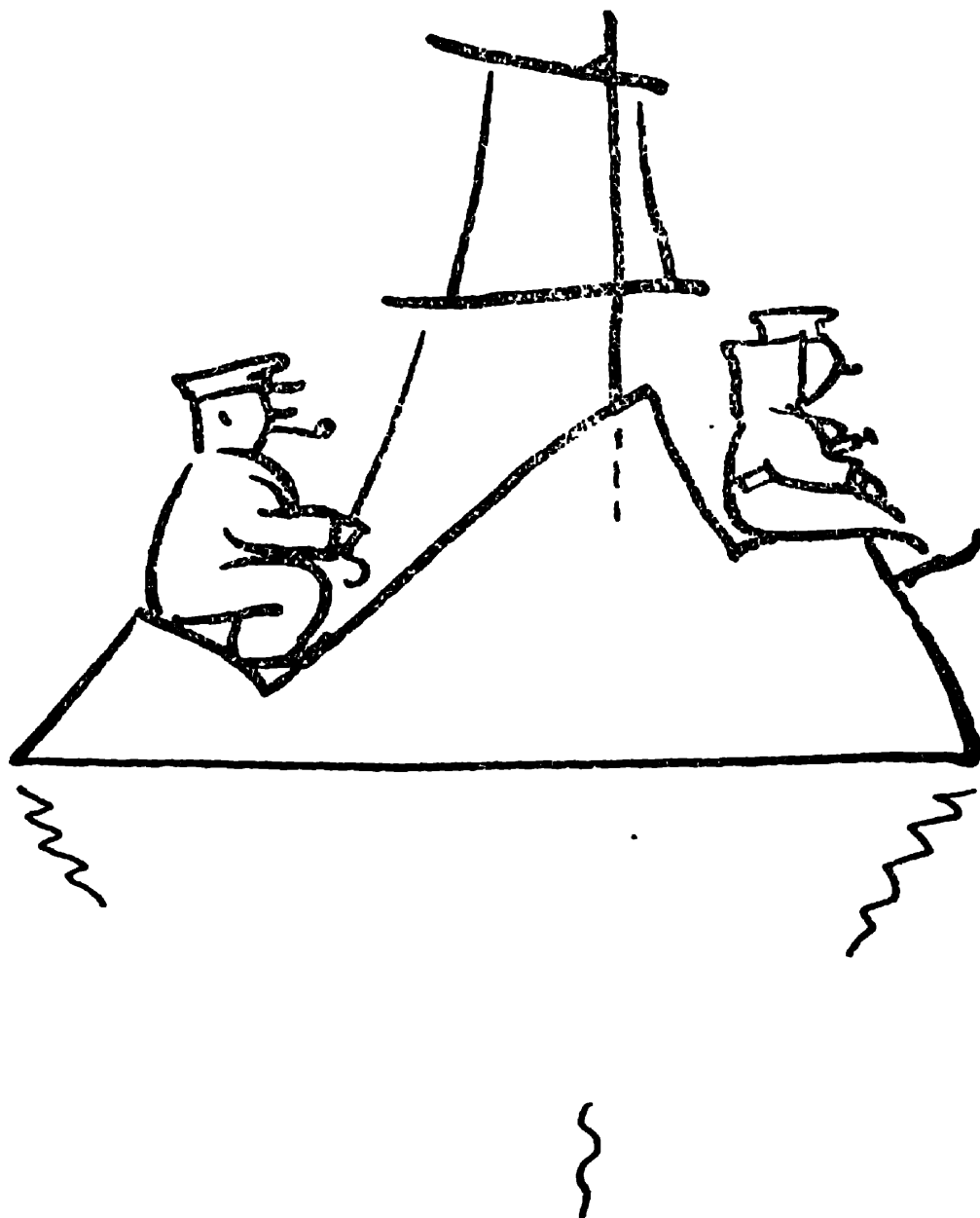
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THE OVERCROWDED ICEBERG



MORLEY ROBERTS

MORLEY ROBERTS has had a varied and adventurous career as a sailor before the mast, as a cattle hand and lumberman all over the United States, and as a traveller in many other parts of the world. His wanderings have provided material for many books, of which his sea stories have been particularly popular.

THE OVERCROWDED ICEBERG

THERE was a deal of ice about, and it came streaming south, in all kinds of shapes, right into the track of ships. There were flat-topped bergs and ice-fields, and there were all kinds of pinnacled danger-traps which were obviously ready to turn turtle and load up any unwary steamer with more ice than she would ever require to make cocktails with. That year ice was reported in great quantities as far south as latitude 40°, and there is every reason to believe that there was more ice run into than was ever reported by one unlucky liner and five tramps which were posted at Lloyd's as "Missing." The Western Ocean is no-peace-at-any-price body of water, and it tries those who sail it as high as any sea in the world, but when the Arctic turns itself loose and empties its refrigerator into the ocean fairway it becomes what seamen call "a holy terror." For ice brings fog, and fog is the real sea-devil, worse than any wind that blows. It was a remarkable thing in such circumstances that Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of *Glos'ter* preserved his equanimity. As Ward, the mate of the *Swan of Avon*, said, he wasn't likely to preserve the *Swan*.

"Dry up, Ward," said his commanding officer, "be so good as to dry up. When I require your advice to run the *Swan* I'll let you know, but in the meantime any uncalled-for jaw on that or any other subject will make me very cross."

"Do you think you can lick me since you went to see that swab at the Foreign Office?" asked Ward, as he edged towards Spink. "Don't you savvy, Spink, that I'm just as able as I was before to pick you up and sling you off of this bridge on to the main-deck?"

"That's as may be," said Spink, "and I don't deny by any means that you are a truculent and insubordinate beast. That's why I shipped you. But it don't follow by no means that because my unfortunate disposition compels me to have officers that can lick me, that I should let 'em navigate the *Swan* on the high lonesome principle. As I said before, you

will be so good as to shut your head. Ice or no ice, I'm going at my speed, not yours. Do you think you are out yachting that I should look after your precious carcase?"

"I believe you are ready to cast her away," said Ward. "Are the bally owners going shares with you?"

Spink shook his bullet head.

"They ain't, and you know it, Ward. There are men who would take such an insinuation as an insult, and if I could lick you perhaps I would. But you know as well as I do that if I wanted to cast her away I'd not do it here. There's no kind of fun that I so despise as open boats in cold weather, and the Western Ocean in ice-time isn't my market for a regatta. I ain't called on to explain to a subordinate my idea in running full speed through this fog and ice, but out of more regard for your feelings than you ever show for mine I don't mind revealing to you that I'm trusting to my luck."

"Your luck!"

"Yes, my luck," replied Spink with great firmness; "for luck I have and no fatal error. I've been thinking of it a lot this trip, and come to the conclusion that I've more solid luck than any man I know intimate. To say nothing of my commanding a rust and putty kerosine can like this old tramp at the age of thirty, when you, that can lick me in a scrap, have to be my mate though you're older, didn't I come out of that little affair at Aguilas with flying colours?"

"You came out with a hole in the funnel that you had to pay for yourself," said Ward. "I don't see where your luck came in."

"Don't you see it might have been worse, you ass?" cried Spink irritably. "But that's nothing. What I've been pondering over chiefly is my very remarkable luck in never having been caught, for a permanency, by any of the ladies that have been after me."

"They haven't lost much," said Ward discourteously. "And I reckon that you are mistook when you think you're that enticing that women hankers to drag you in by the hair of your head and kiss you by force."

"I never said so," replied Spink; "but the fact remains that I'm not married."

"You're a selfish beast, Spink, and I sincerely hope you'll be married before you're through," said Ward.

"You are the most insolent mate I ever had," replied Spink, "and the most unfeeling. Did you hear a fog-horn?"

Though it was in the middle of the forenoon watch it was pretty nearly as dark off the Banks as it would have been inside a dock warehouse, for the fog was as thick as a blanket. The rail and the decks were slimy with it, and the skipper and his mate were as wet as if it had been raining. The fog came swirling in thick wreaths, and sometimes half choked them. The wind from the north-east was light but very cold, as if it blew off the face of an iceberg, as it probably did. The *Swan* had an air of thorough discomfort, and in spite of it was steaming into the west at her best speed of nine knots.

It is no wonder that Spink and Ward quarrelled; there was hardly a soul on board who was not in a bad temper. Nothing disturbs seamen as much as fog, and the fact that Spink refused to be disturbed by it made it all the worse for the others. Ward was distinctly nervous, and let the fog play on his nerves. He saw steamers ahead that had no existence, and heard fog-horns that were nothing but the sound of his own blood in his ears.

"Yes, I do hear a fog-horn. It's on the starboard bow," he said anxiously.

"Not a bit of it, Ward, it's on the port bow. It's some darned old windjammer. I'll give her a friendly hoot."

He made the whistle give a melancholy wail, which was not answered by the ship for which it was intended, but by a gigantic liner which burst through the fog looking like high land, and booming at the rate of at least twenty knots. She loomed over them in the obscurity, and Ward gave an involuntary howl which fetched the *Swan's* crowd out on deck in time to see that there was no need to kick their boots off and swim for it. They were also in time to answer the insulting remarks of the liner's two officers on the bridge, as she scraped past them with about the length of a hand-spike to spare.

"You miserable, condemned tramp," said the liner as she swept by.

"Oh, you man-drowning dogs," replied the crowd of the *Swan*.

And everything else that was said never reached its mark. The liner was swallowed up, and resumed her attempt to make a good passage in spite of what she logged as "hazy" weather.

"What did I tell you about my luck?" asked Spink coolly, and Ward very naturally had nothing to say till he got his breath. What he said then could only have been said to a

skipper who had so unfortunate a disposition towards violence that he had two ship officers who could lick him.

"You are a wonder," said Ward, "and I wish you had been dead before I saw you. Ain't you thinking of others' lives if you ain't of your own?"

"What's the use of arguing with a thick-head like you, Ward?" asked Spink. "If that blamed express packet slowed down to our jog-trot her skipper would feel as sick as if he had anchored, and he'd log it 'dead slow,' and the rotters that judge divorces and collisions would call him the most praiseworthy swine that ever ran another ship down. What's the logic of it? Why should I daunder along at five knots? I might be lingering just where I'd be caught by such another or by a berg. I trust in Providence and my luck, and if you don't like it you can get out and walk."

At this moment a bellow was heard for'ard, "Ice on the starboard bow," and Spink, who for all his talk had the eyes of a cat, motioned to the man at the wheel to starboard the helm a few spokes. The *Swan* ground past a small berg, and had a narrower shave than with the liner.

"If we'd been going a trifle slower, Ward," said the skipper, "I might have plugged that lump plump in the middle, and you would have been down on the main-deck seeing the boats put over the side."

"There's no arguing with you," growled the mate, "you'd sicken a hog, and I wish it was Day's watch instead of mine. If he has the same temper when he wakes that he went below with, you'll have a dandy time with him."

He relapsed into a silence which Spink found more trying than open insubordination, for Spink was a cheerful soul.

"Here, I can't stand this, Ward——"

"What can't you stand?" asked Ward sulkily.

"Not being spoken to, of course," replied the skipper. "I order you to be more cheerful. I don't ask you to be polite, for I know you can't be; but you can talk when you aren't wanted to, so you just talk now."

"I won't unless you slow down," said Ward. "I don't see why I should talk and be cheerful with a sea-lunatic."

"Well," said Spink, "I'll slow her down to half speed to please you, for the Lord knows there's enough ice about without my having a lump of it for a mate. Ring her down to half speed, and be damned to you!"

Ward rang her to half speed without any second order.

"And I sincerely hope I shan't regret bein' weak enough to give way," said Spink, "for I'm a deal too easy-going and reasonable."

He lighted his pipe and smoked steadily. As both Ward and Day admitted, he might be hard to get along with, but he had nerves which would have done credit to a bull. Most skippers in the Western Ocean get into the state of mind which sees disaster before it is in sight, and if they don't take to drink, it is because they die of continued scares. Spink feared nothing under heaven, and though he sometimes drank more than was good for him, it was not because he wanted it, but because he liked it. There is a great distinction between these two ways of drinking. After a few minutes of silence he turned to Ward.

"Do you feel easier in your mind, Ward?"

"I do," said Ward. "I own it freely."

Spink snorted.

"As sure as ice is ice when you get a command of your own, you'll take to drink," said Spink. "And now, as you're satisfied at getting your own way, I'll go below and have a snooze."

About six bells in the forenoon watch the *Swan* ran out of "Bank weather" into beautiful sunlight, and Ward rang her up to full speed. All about them were icebergs small and large, which sparkled like jewels in the sun. There was one long, low berg right ahead of them, there was one to the south'ard which was peaked and scraped and pinnacled into the semblance of a medieval castle. Ward, as Spink said, had no soul for beauty unless it wore petticoats, and to him, as to all seamen, ice in any shape was ugly.

"If he's had his way she'd have come a mucker on that beggar ahead," said Ward, as he passed to windward of the big, table-topped berg. "I wish we was out of it. This fine spell won't last long, and there is more thick weather ahead of us or I'm a Dago."

He gave her up to Day at noon with pleasure, and took his grub alone as the skipper was fast asleep. When he turned out again at four o'clock he found the fog as thick as ever, and Bill Day as cross as he could stick at having to yank the whistle lanyard every minute or so. As soon as Ward showed his nose on the bridge Bill let out at him.

"What kind of a relief do you call this?" he demanded savagely. "I wish I'd had this laniard round your neck, I'd have had you out of your bunk in good time, I swear."

As a matter of fact, Ward was only three minutes behind time, and always prided himself on giving a good relief.

"Has Double Glos'ter been worrying you that you're so sick?" he asked. "You know damn well that you owe me hours. Oh, don't talk, go below and die, as you always do when you see blankets. Has there been much ice?"

"It's blinking well all round the bally shop," returned the second mate. "Didn't you wake when I stopped her dead?"

"No," said Ware.

"And you talk of my dying when I get below," retorted Day. He slid off the bridge, and proceeded to justify the mate's accusation by falling asleep before his head touched the pillow, in spite of the melancholy hootings of the *Swan* as she picked her way delicately in the fog and ice. It was very nearly eight bells again before Captain Harry Sharpness Spink of Glo'ster showed on deck. As he meant to stay on deck all night he had really been very moderate.

"So I've missed Newcastle?" he said.

"Lucky for you," returned Ward; "his temper was horrid."

Spink sighed.

"I'm the most unfortunate man that ever commanded any blasted hooker that ever sailed the seas," he said. "Day tries me more than you do, Ward. There are times I regret I ever knew him. I must have been brought up badly to have such a disposition as I have. Well, well, it can't be helped, a man is what he was meant to be, there is no get-away from that. But I should admire to see you plug him. Oh, I say, it's fairly thick, ain't it?"

It was a deal thicker than much of the pea-soup served up in the *Swan*, though Spink rather prided himself on the way the men were fed in her.

"Are you nervous?" asked Spink.

"I ain't by any means happy," said Ward; "and no seaman worthy of the name can be happy on the Banks in weather like this."

"That's a slur on me, I know," said Spink, "but I look over it."

"What would you do if you didn't?" asked Ward.

Spink did not reply to this challenge, and inside of a minute both he and Ward had something to think of besides quarrelling about nothing. The fog lifted for a moment, and showed ice all about them. The air grew bitterly cold, and was soon close on the freezing point. Spink slowed her down again, and almost literally felt his way through the obstacles. Once he touched a small berg, but when he did so he was going dead slow. Ward stood by and saw the "old man" handle the *Swan* with admiration. When they were once more through the thick of it he spoke.

"I wish I could understand you, Spink," he said, with far more respect than he often showed. "You're the most reckless skipper I ever sailed with, and now you're more careful than I should be."

"I don't trust in my luck till I can't see," said Spink, and he turned her over to Ward, saying, "Go your own pace, my son. It's most agreeable when you are civil."

And next minute the catastrophe happened, for at half speed the old *Swan* bunted her nose into a low but very solid berg, and the result was very much the same as if she had tried conclusions head on with a dock wall. She crumpled up like a bandbox when it is inadvertently sat on, and it would have been obvious to the least instructed observer that her chance of going much farther was a very small one indeed. She trembled and was jarred to her vitals, her iron decks lifted up like a carpet, with the wind underneath it, one of the funnel stays parted with a loud twang, and the crowd forward came out on deck as if the devil was behind them. And the fog was still so thick that it was impossible to see them from the bridge. But they soon saw Bill Day, for even his ability to sleep through most things could not stand being thrown out of his bunk.

"What's up now?" roared the second mate. And the skipper showed at his very best.

"Ward would have her at half speed," said Spink coolly, "and that gave the southerly drift time to bring that blasted berg just where it could do its work."

And poor Ward hadn't a word to say. Spink had plenty. He spoke to the crew below.

"Keep quiet there—you," he snapped, without the least sign of a disturbed mind. And up came the chief engineer, M'Pherson, in pyjamas and a blue funk.

"What's happened, captain? Oh, what's gone wrang the noo?" he cried.

"She's hit more than a penn'orth of ice, Mr. M'Pherson," replied the skipper, "and if I were you I'd get my clothes on. Tell me what water she is making, and look slippy. Mr. Ward, see to the boats. Mr. Day, take the steward and a couple of hands and get some stores up on deck."

He was so cool that he inspired unlimited confidence, although it was now obvious to them all that the *Swan's* very minutes were numbered. It did not require old Mac's report that the water was coming on board like a millstream to show them that. The engineers and firemen came on deck, and Spink addressed them in what he considered suitable and encouraging terms.

"Now then, you stokehold scum, less jaw there; you won't get drowned this trip."

They were exceedingly glad to hear it, for a lot of them were of a different opinion and said so. There was no time to waste, and indeed none was lost. The real trouble began when it was found that one boat wouldn't swim, after the manner and custom of boats in the Mercantile Marine, and when another was staved in by a swinging lump of ice the moment it took the water. This lump was a small "calf" of the larger berg which they had struck on, and the next moment the original obstacle swung alongside, and ground heavily against the steamer.

"There ain't enough boats," said the skipper. "Mr. Ward, d'ye think you could hook on to that berg? We'll have to board it and make out as best we can."

As the *Swan* was a vessel of close on fourteen hundred tons, her kedge anchor ought to have weighed something like four and a half hundredweight. As a matter of fact it had once belonged to something in the shape of a tug, and it weighed barely two. Ward picked it up as if it was a toy and hove it on the berg, and followed it with a warp.

"Bully for you," said the skipper, and as he spoke the *Swan* gave forth a noise very much like a hiccup. "Down on the ice the port watch, and the others get the stores over the side. Steward, all the blankets you can get. Mr. Day, put over the side anything to make a raft of; we may want one if the berg melts."

Spars and hencoops and everything that would float went

over the side, some of it on the ice and some of it into the water. A couple of hands in the only sound boat kept her clear of the berg and the *Swan*, and shoved the floating dunnage to those on the new vessel, which had promptly been christened "The Sailor's Home." Their late home was about to disappear, and said so in terms that were quite unmistakable by the initiated.

"Now then," said Spink, "when the rest of you are over the side I'm ready. Ward, take the chronometer as I lower it down. And be careful with this bag, there's the ship's papers and my sextant in it."

"Now boom her off," said Spink, "for the *Swan's* going."

There was a tremendous crack on board.

"The fore bulkhead," said Spink, and then the poor old *Swan* cocked her stern in the air. A furious gush of steam came up from the engine-room and all the stokehold ventilators, until the sea came almost level with the after hatch.

"She's going down head foremost," said the crew, "poor old *Swan*."

And then there was a mighty shivaree on board. The whole of the cargo in No. 1 and No. 2 holds fetched away, and evidently shot right out at the bows. All this mixture of cargo must have been followed by the engines slipping from their beds, for instead of doing a dive head foremost, the *Swan's* stern, which had been high in air, went under with a big splash, and she lifted her ragged bows in the fog before she went down with a long-drawn, melancholy gurgle.

"She warn't such a bad old packet after all," said the sad crew. And for at least a minute no one said another word. Then Ward spoke.

"Where the hell's your luck now, Spink?"

"What's become of your theory that half speed in a fog is any better than going at it at my rate?" asked Spink. "You haven't a leg to stand on, and I don't propose to take advice from you again. You've disappointed me sadly! My luck is where it was, except in the matter of my officers, and it's notorious that I have no luck with them. We're out of the *Swan* without a life lost, we've got heaps of grub, plenty of blankets, and a fine comfortable iceberg under us. There's many this hour in the Western Ocean that might envy us, and don't you make any error about that. I come from Glo'ster, and my name is Captain Harry Sharpness Spink,

and drunk or sober it's as good as havin' your life insured to sail with me. Oh, I'm all right, and I propose to plug the first man that growls, if he's as big as the side of a house."

None of them was in trim to take up the challenge, and Spink lighted his pipe.

"Three cheers for the captain," said the crew, and they cheered him heartily, for which he thanked them most regally, though he somewhat spoilt the effect of it afterwards by telling them to go to hell out of that and pick a place to camp in at a little distance.

"So far as I can see in this fog there's plenty of room for everyone," said Spink, as the night grew dark. That was where he was wrong, for they soon discovered, by falling into the water on the far side, that they were on no great ice island, but had picked a very small berg indeed. Spink consoled them by telling them that they wouldn't be on it long, and they could hardly help believing him as he seemed so certain of it.

"And after all," he said to Day and Ward, "the old *Swan* was insured for more than she was worth, and I shouldn't be surprised if the owners were pleased with the catastrophe."

He wrapped himself in blankets and lay down. In five minutes he was breathing like a child.

"I tell you," said the second mate, "the 'old man' is a wonder, for all we have to treat him like a kid. I say, Ward, let's be kind to him to-morrow and say Glo'ster is just as good as any other county."

"I don't mind," said Ward; "but if we do he'll take advantage of it."

"Oh, let him," said Day. "He's a fair scorcher, and if he gets too rowdy we can always put him down. On my soul I'm gettin' to like him. He's got the pluck of a bull-dog. Where's old Mac?"

They found Mac sitting in a puddle of melting ice-water, weeping about his family at Glasgow. The second engineer, whose name was Calder, was trying to console his chief by saying it might have been worse.

"It canna be waur, man," said old Mac. "What can be waur than bein' wreckit, and on a wee sma' bit o' ice that's vesibly meltin' as I sit on it? The cauld is strikin' through to my very banes, and in the hurry I've had the sair misfortune to come away wi'out the medicine for my rheumatics."

To-morrow I'll be i' a knot wi' 'em, and nothing for it but cauld water, which I couldna abide sin' I was a bairn. And all my work on the engines wasted. I'm a mournful man this hour."

He drank something out of a bottle. As he had left his medicine behind it could not have been that. It certainly did him no good, for he wept all the more after taking it, and throwing himself in Calder's arms he insisted that the second engineer was his mother, and begged her not to insist on his having a cold bath.

"He's a puir silly buddy," said Calder, "and I've no great opeenion of him as an engineer, though he's no' the fool he seems the noo."

And the night wore away while Mac wept and Spink slept the sleep of the righteous, and Ward and Day smoked in silence. As for the crew, they lay huddled up together, and only woke to swear at the new kind of "doss." On the whole, everyone but the chief engineer was not unhappy, and even he, by reason of the attention he paid to the bottle which did not contain medicine, fell fast asleep and snored like a very appropriate fog-horn. The dawn broke very early, at about three, and it found most of the inhabitants of the berg still unconscious. In the night the fog lifted, and the sea was almost as calm as a duck-pond. What wind there was now blew from the west, and was much warmer than it had been. Within a mile there were two or three other small bergs, but when Spink grunted and yawned and crawled out of his blankets there was nothing else in sight.

"Humph," said Spink, "this is a rummy go, and if I didn't come from Glo'ster I should be in a blue funk. I must keep up my spirits, and show 'em what my luck's like. I've been in worse fixes than this many a time, and after all, with a good seaworthy berg underfoot, and lashings of grub, I don't see why anyone should growl. If anyone does I'll knock his head off. Now, which of these jokers is the cook?"

He found the steward, and booted him gently in the ribs. At least he said it was gently, whatever the aggrieved steward thought of it.

"Now then, Cox," said the skipper, "turn out and find me the cook—he's one of this pile of snorin' hogs—and let's have some breakfast."

By the time the grub was ready, Ward and Day were "on deck," and the sun was beginning to think of doing the same. The two mates looked round the horizon and saw nothing to comfort them. The only cheerful thing in sight was the skipper, and for very shame the more pessimistic Ward screwed up a smile.

"Not so bad, is it?" asked Spink.

"It might be worse, I own," replied the mate. "What course are you steerin', Spink?"

"Straight for Glo'ster," replied Spink cheerfully. "How did you chaps sleep?"

Ward said he hadn't slept at all, but Day averred that he had dreamt he had been locked in a refrigerator belonging to some cold-meat steamer from Australia. And just then the steward said that breakfast was ready. It consisted of cold tinned beef, iced biscuit, and melted berg. There were signs of a mutiny among the crew at once.

"Say, cook, where's the cawfy?" they asked, and they were only reduced to a proper sense of the situation by a few strong remarks from Captain Spink. The riot subsided before it really began, and all the "slop-built, greedy sons of corby crows," as Spink called them, sat down meekly and ate what they were given. And then the sun came up and warmed them, and they soon began to feel well and happy. But now the real trouble of the situation began to develop. The heat of the summer sun when it once got high enough to do some work began to melt the berg. It was rather higher in the middle than it was on the edges, and it was most amazingly slippery. The water ran off it in streams, and as it was barely big enough to start with, it looked as if they would shortly be crowded.

"I never thought of this," said Spink. "I tell you, Ward, she'll turn turtle before we know where we are. We must put all the stores in the boat, and have a man in her to keep her clear if the berg capsizes."

"Your luck ain't what you let on," said Ward gloomily; "the thing faï melts under us, and we'll have to swim."

"To thunder with your croaking," said Spink. "Oh, do dry up."

"I wish the berg would," said Ward, as he superintended the shipment of the stores. When it was done he put a cockney deck-hand into her and made him shove off.

"Blimy," said Lim'us, "I'm likely to be the on'y dry of the 'ole shoot."

The word "shoot" soon threatened to become highly appropriate, for about noon the berg was distinctly cranky. However fast it melted above, it was obviously melting much faster down below, for they had apparently struck a streak of comparatively warm water, and when ice does go it goes fast. The "crowd" got very uneasy, and Spink got very cross as he arranged them so as to trim his craft.

"Sit still, you swine," said Spink. "Do you want to capsize us?"

"But we're so cold be'ind, sittin' still, sir," said one bolder than the rest.

"I'll warm you if I have to come over and speak to you," said Spink, and he presently undertook to do it. The moment he rose to carry out his threat the iceberg wobbled in the most dreadful manner, and so encouraged the offender that he laughed.

"If you come to 'it me, captain, she'll go over," he said with a malicious grin.

"So she will," said Ward, laying hold of the skipper to prevent his moving. But Spink was not to be balked. He spoke to another of the men sitting near the mutineer.

"Jackson, you come here while I go over there and dress Billings down."

"Don't you go, Jackson, for if you do I'll dress you down to a proper tune arterwards," said the insubordinate Billings, as he grabbed hold of Jackson, who looked at the skipper appealingly.

"What am I to do, sir?" he asked.

"You're to obey orders," said Spink.

"Don't you forgit I'll plug you if you do," said Billings.

Poor Jackson was obviously in serious difficulties, for Billings was the boss and bully of the fo'c'sle. He could even lick any of the firemen, and there were some very tough gentry among that gang.

"If I don't come over to you, sir, what will you do?" Jackson asked the skipper nervously.

"I'll come over to you, if we're in the drink the next moment," replied Spink firmly. "Don't any of you Johnnies think you can best me. Are you coming or are you not?"

Jackson shook his shock head.

"This is very hard lines on a peaceable cove like me," said Jackson; "but if I am to catch toko, I'd much rather take it from Billings than from you, sir."

And as he spoke, he smote Billings very violently on the nose. Billings, who expected nothing less, let a horrid bellow out of him and promptly slipped on the ice. He fell, and slid overboard with a howl, and the berg came near to capsizing then and there.

"Well done, Jackson," said Spink approvingly, as Billings disappeared in the sea, "very well done indeed." And then Billings rose to the surface.

"Can you swim, Billings?" asked Spink with an air of kindly curiosity. "Oh yes, I see you can, so keep on doing it till you feel a little less mutinous."

It took Billings rather less than a minute to become obedient, for though the sea was warm enough to melt the berg it was by no means so warm as a swimming bath, and he presently howled for mercy and was dragged upon the ice once more.

It was lucky for Billings that the sun by now was really hot. He stripped off his clothes and squeezed them as dry as he could, while he threatened to kill Jackson as soon as he could. His threats were interrupted by the sound of a large crack, and presently there were obvious signs that the berg was about to capsize. Lim'us got quite excited as they discussed the situation, and came in close, till Ward ordered him to get farther away. As he rowed off reluctantly he encouraged them by yelling, "She's goin' over! May the Lord look sideways at me if she ain't."

"Oh, oh!" said poor old Mac, "I'm a puir meeserable sinner wi' a sore head and no medicine, and I'll be wet in a crack, and I'll die wi'out a wee drappie. Oh, oh, oh!"

And the berg stopped cracking but took on an ugly cant. A big lump of ice broke off it down below and came up to the surface with a leap.

"Steady, you swine," said Spink politely to his unhappy crew; and Ward asked him where his luck was. Whatever answer he wa^s to get he never knew, for with a curious heave the berg started on a roll, and with a suddenness which took them all with surprise she bucked them into the Atlantic, together with what materials they had for a raft. It was a lucky thing for at least half of them that there had been time

to save such dunnage from the *Swan*, for half the crowd, including M'Pherson and Day, could not swim a stroke. Ward grabbed Day and helped him to a spar, and Spink did the same for old Mac. And in the meantime Lim'us made everyone furious by squealing with laughter in the boat. Billings threatened him with death when he got hold of him, and Spink had no mind or breath to rebuke the horrid and bloodthirsty language with which the late mutineer reinforced his threats.

"Oh, oh!" squealed old Mac when the skipper laid hold of him; "oh, oh, I'm drooned, I'm drooned! and I've the rheumatism bad in a' my joints."

And Spink said he was the howling and illegitimate descendant of three generations without any character whatever, as he dragged him to a floating oar alongside the capsized berg. Now it was not so high out of water, and there was far more space on it. For some time it would be comparatively stable, and when Spink scrambled on it the first of anyone he congratulated himself on his never-failing luck. He helped the rest on board, and the whole space was soon occupied by an unclad crowd wringing the Atlantic out of their clothes, and trying to get warm in the sun. It was quite astonishing how cheerful everyone was, with the single exception of that confirmed pessimist the chief engineer. At their end of the berg the men took to skylarking, and Billings actually forgave Jackson.

"You done what I'd ha' done myself," said Billings, "for I owns now I'd a'most as soon take on that big brute Ward as 'ave the skipper get about me. But when I give 'im that back-talk I was that icy be'ind that I was like froze Haustrialian mutting, and as cross as if my old woman 'ad been relatin' what 'er mother thought of me. I furgives you, Jackson, I furgives you this once. But don't you hever 'it me on the smeller agin, or a penny peep-show won't be in it for the sight you'll be."

It was considered by the crowd that Billings by this act of nobility had shown himself a "gent," and Billings swaggered greatly on the strength of it.

The crew, of course, did not think. They were not paid to do so. All that was the officers' business. It hardly occurred to them that the ice on which they stood wasn't likely to last for ever. In the warmth of the sun they forgot

the discomforts of the past night, and did not think of the night to come. But Ward did, and he was still very gloomy on the situation.

"Just as she spilt us," said Ward, "I was askin' you your opinion of your luck. What do you think of it now? Perhaps you'll use that regal authority of a skipper to get us out of the hole you've got us in."

If ever any skipper had the right to be justly indignant, Spink thought he was that man.

"The hole I got you in! I like that, oh, I do like that. Who was it, I ask, that pestered me to go half speed, and almost wept till I said 'Have your own way, you cross-eyed swine'?"

"You never addressed them words to me," said Ward truculently, "or I'd have given you what for, and well you know it."

Spink shook his head.

"I ain't saying that I used them very words," he urged, "all I mean is that that was what I meant when I let you have your own silly way, which has landed me and Day, to say nothin' of the rest, on a penn'orth of ice in mid-Atlantic, more or less."

"Don't bring me into the argument," said Day. "You're a cunning sort of a chap, Spink, but you needn't try to raise ructions between me and Ward, for I won't have it. I know you, Spink."

"I'm a very unfortunate man," said poor Spink, "for at this very moment I'd give three months' pay to be able to lick the pair of you. I did think after what the Chief Foreign Officer said of my authority that I should be more civilly treated by my officers, even if I have an unfortunate disposition which compels me to lick them if I can. I shipped you two because I can't, but that ain't any reason for makin' me miserable, or at any rate more miserable than bein' in the position of not bein' able to."

"Oh, all right," said Day, "go ahead and moan. Nobody's stoppin' you, is he? Let him alone, Ward. He's all right; and as for fightin', I believe I could teach him to be too much for myself in a month with the boxin' gloves."

"I wish you would," said Spink. "Oh, Day, you've no notion how I should enjoy pastin' you."

He fell into contemplation of such a joy, and did not

speak till Ward clapped him on the back and said he was a very good sort after all.

"And if it's any use to you, I own that my havin' gone half speed that time may have put us here. But sayin' so much don't mean that I now approve of buttin' headlong into an ice-pack at twenty knots an hour. But to go back to what I was sayin' before you started this row, where's your luck, Spink? To my mind it don't look so healthy a breed of luck as you let on, and it's my own notion that old Mac is of my opinion, to judge by the sad expression of his countenance."

"To blazes with the old fool!" said Spink. "Who cares what he thinks? My luck is where it was, and I reckon to get out of this with flyin' colours, and never a man short and nothin' against the certificates of any of us. I've noticed all my life that I seem to be under the special care of Providence, and I don't believe Providence will go back on me after plantin' me here all safe and sound on an iceberg. Day, rake up that cook, and give the cockney in the boat a hail. We'll have some grub. I've a twist on me like a machine-made hawser."

They went to dinner, and the sun did something of the same sort. At any rate, it went out of sight, and a thick fog came down on the castaways.

"We 'opes no bloomin' packet 'll come and run us pore blighters down," said the men as they fell to work on the grub, "for accordin' to the 'old man,' who is the cheerfulest bloke in difficulties we ever struck, we're right in the track of the 'ole shoot of 'em, and may be picked up or scooted into the sea again any minute."

As a matter of fact, they were then on the southern tail of the Bank, for when the *Swan* butted her nose into the berg, she was pretty well at the locality on the Grand Bank where the usual "lane" to New York is left for the lane to Halifax. The very watch before the collision they had verified their position by flying the "blue pigeon," as seamen call the deep-sea lead, and ever since then they had been floating in the Labrador current to the south and east. To locate them exactly, they were just about where the Great Circle Track of steamers from the English Channel to the Gulf of Mexico crosses the tail of the Bank. There was every chance of something coming along there, even if it was getting late

enough in the season for the big liners to take the route to the south'ard for fear of the very ice which had brought them to grief.

"Oh yes," said the crowd, when they were full up with food, "we're all right."

Nevertheless the fog did not cheer them up to any great extent, and when it showed signs of lasting all day they grew less happy.

"A hundred vessels might pass us in this," said Ward, who for all his bigness had much less endurance than the skipper, and was now hardly more cheerful than old Mac. "I wish I was out of it."

"Oh, wish again," retorted Spink contemptuously. "Do you know, Ward, that you make me tired? What do you get by howlin' and growlin'? I know this is goin' to come out all right, and I won't be discouraged by any silly jaw of a man that ought to know better. Shut up."

And to Day's surprise Ward shut up. At that very moment there came a bellow from Billings, who had relieved Lim'us in the boat.

"Berg, ahoy!" roared Billings.

"Hallo!" replied the skipper. "What's the matter now?"

"I'ears a steamer, so help me Dick!" bellowed Billings joyfully. "I'ears'er plain. Don't none of you blokes'ear'er too?"

There was such a buzz among the crowd that it would have been hard to hear a fog-horn, and it was not until Spink had hit three, kicked half a dozen, and used at least ten pounds' worth of bad language, according to 19 Geo. II, cap. 21, that anything like silence was restored. Then it was obvious that Billings had made no mistake. The sea was fairly calm, the breeze from the west was light, and any sound carried long and far.

"She's coming from the westward," said Spink, as he consulted a toy compass on his watch-chain.

"No," said Day, "she's bound west, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Then you come from Amsterdam for a certainty," said the "old man" crossly. "Now, men, shout all together when I say three. One, two, three."

And just as the men yelled there was a *boot-too-oot* from the steamship, which for a moment made them believe she had heard them. But Spink knew better, and when there was another hoot he grabbed Day by the arm.

"By Jemima," said Spink, "we're both right, Day. There are two of 'em; that second squeal never came out of the same whistle that the first one did!"

Now the nature of fog is something that no fellow can understand. Seamen must not think they are a long way off if they hear a sound faintly, or even if they do not hear it at all. That's bad enough, but there is worse behind. They are not to reckon they are near because they hear it plainly, or that it isn't to be heard farther away at some other spot if they cease to hear it at all. And, furthermore, any notion that a sound comes from any particular direction is the biggest trap of the lot. Now the uninitiated can understand that they do not understand, and that seamen are in the same awkward fix whenever a fog comes down to cheer them on their weary way. The two steamers coming out of nothingness and butting into it were commanded by men who trusted to the evidence of their senses, as if they were police magistrates trusting to policemen. They hooted and bellowed in the most wonderful manner, and said with one short blast that they were directing their course to starboard. And as neither knew where the other was, or where he was himself, they directed their courses with the most marvellous precision to the exact spot on the tail of the Grand Bank in the Western Ocean where they could collide. And they did so with a most horrid grinding crash, and with one long, last, fearful and hopeless wail on their steam-whistles.

"Holy sailor," said the iceberg's crew, "this time they've been and gone and done it!"

Ward asked Spink sickly if he had any remarks to make about his luck. Spink hadn't, but he had some remarks to make about Ward, which in other circumstances would have led to war. While he was relieving his overcharged mind there was a horrid uproar coming out of the fog; for both the steamships were blowing off steam, and everybody on board of them appeared to be running the entire show at the top of his voice. And just as it was all at its extreme point of interest the fog played one of its commonest tricks, and with an anacoustic wall shut off the whole dreadful play in one single moment.

The castaways turned to each other in alarm, and Billings, who had nearly lost himself in the fog, rowed in close.

"I think they've both foundered," said Billings, and it

certainly looked as if he were right, in spite of what Spink said to him.

"I believe the josses is right," said Day; and old Mac wept and said he was sure of it, and that he had the rheumatics badly, and that he was very cold. And to add to Spink's joy, once more Ward asked if he still thought he was under the especial protection of Providence. Then for the first time Spink lost his temper and went for Ward, and by dint of taking him by surprise served him as Jackson had served Billings.

"Take that, you swab," said the enraged skipper. "I'll teach you to be so discouraging and so blasphemous as to cast a slur on Providence."

And when Ward climbed upon the ice again all he said was :

"All right, Spink, you wait till we're on board that beastly packet you and Providence have up your sleeves."

And everyone sat down and smoked, and said how grieved they were for the poor unfortunate beggars who had been drowned through having no nice comfortable iceberg to take refuge on. Then they had their supper and went to sleep, leaving all their cares in the faithful hands of poor Spink.

"Ah," he sighed, "my unfortunate disposition cuts me off from all real sympathy. I've no one to confide in at sea or ashore, and as if bein' a shipmaster wasn't solitary enough I must plug Ward and make him hostile. I wish I'd been brought up better and licked more before I got into this fatal habit of fighting."

He couldn't go to sleep, and took to walking as far as the narrow limits at his disposal would allow him. When he found that he was in for a restless night he told the man on the look-out that he could turn in. Jackson, who happened to be the look-out, lingered a little before he did as he was told.

"Do you think, sir," he asked with some trepidation at his daring to speak to the skipper, "do you think, sir, that we shall ever get out o' this?"

"Of coturse we shall," said Spink. "What do you suppose I'm here for? Go to sleep, Jackson, and mind your own business. You'll be all right."

And Jackson, who was a simple-minded seaman of the real old sort, fell asleep feeling that the "old man" was to be

relied on even on an iceberg in the Western Ocean and in a fog as thick as No. 1 canvas.

For by now the fog was thick and no mistake. As Spink walked the ice, and squelched with his sea-boots in the melted puddles, he could hardly see his hand before his face, and more than once he nearly walked overboard. At midnight it was even thicker, and he was obliged to give up walking and come to anchor on a tin of corned beef, and though he was on watch it has to be owned that he dozed for a few minutes, just as Lim'us did in the boat which lay a little way off the berg. When Spink woke he found it just about as dark as their prospects. When his eyes cleared, he sighed and looked about him, with a mind which took some of its tone from the fog and from the dull dead hour of two o'clock in the morning.

"I wonder if my luck is out," he sighed, and he stared stolidly into the solidest darkness. It was certainly monstrously dark in one direction. He rubbed his eyes and grunted. Then he lighted a match and looked at his little compass. His mind went back to the lady in Bristol who had given it to him.

"She was a very pretty piece," said Spink thoughtfully. "But I'm damned if I can see why it should be darkest towards the east."

He rose up and peered into the fog. Again he rubbed his eyes and then stood staring.

"Perhaps another berg," he said, "but——"

He stood as still as if his figure had been turned into stone, and presently he looked to the sleeping crowd, who were all as solid with sleep as if they were dead, and nodded in the strangest way.

"Oh, oh, if it is ; if it only isn't a horrid delusion," he murmured. He turned to the darkness again and shook his fist at it and the fog. At that very moment the fog rolled up like a curtain. Right in front of Spink, and not farther than a man could chuck a biscuit, there lay the strange and almost monstrous apparition of a silent, lightless, and derelict steamer !

"What did I say to Ward about Providence ?" asked Spink of the whole Atlantic Ocean. "Ward cast a nasty and uncalled-for slur on its ways when he said what he did. But now I've got the bulge on him, and no fatal error about it."

He rubbed his hands together and smiled very happily.

"There'll be fine pickings in this and no mistake," he murmured. "Oh, this'll be something like salvage. And I'll lay dollars to cents that I can tell how it ever happened. Ah, here comes the fog again!"

The fog dropped down in a thin veil, till the dim and ghostly derelict looked still less substantial than it had done. Then it heaved and rolled in, and the deserted packet could be seen no more. Spink sighed but was happy.

"I'll give Ward the biggest surprise he ever had in his life," he said, as he turned to the boat in which young Lim'us was doing a very solid caulk. Spink kicked some ice into small lumps, and at the third attempt he hit the sleeper on the side of his head. Lim'us woke with a start, and heard the captain's voice just in time to prevent him threatening to eviscerate the swab who was slinging things at him.

"Hold your infernal jaw," said Spink in a savage whisper, "and pull in here quiet, or I'll murder you."

Lim'us obeyed instantly, though he had doubts as to whether it was wise to come within arm's length of the skipper after having been caught asleep.

"I warn't asleep, sir; stri'my blind if I was," he began as he came up to the berg.

"Dry up and say nothin'," said Spink. "If you wake anyone I'll see you don't sleep again for a week. Hand up some of that truck and get the stem sheets clear, I want to get in myself."

There was more than a chance of not finding the derelict and of losing the iceberg, and Spink knew it. Just as he was about to chance it he remembered that he had a couple of balls of strong twine in the bag into which he had dumped all his belongings, including the precious ship's papers, when he left the *Swan*. As he recalled this lucky fact a heavenly smile overspread his handsome features.

"It's a splendid notion," said Spink. "I feel as proud of it as a dog with two tails! I wish those chaps at the Foreign Office were here now; they would enjoy it better than a play."

He stepped to his bag as lightly as a Polar bear after a sleeping seal, and when he found the twine he tied the end of it to Ward's leg.

"Ward at one end and Providence at the other," said Spink with a grin. "Oh, won't he be surprised!"

And the skipper went back to the boat, paying out the twine as he went. He was chuckling in the merriest way, and poor Lim'us, who was cold, and very sick of the whole affair, thought that the strain had been too much for him.

"'E's balmy on the crumpet, that's what's the matter wiv 'im," said Lim'us as he obeyed orders reluctantly, and pulled into the solid fog with a mad and grinning skipper, who would probably scupper him as soon as they were out of earshot of the crew.

"I wish I was in Lim'us," said he. "I'd give all my wyges to see Commercial Rowd agin."

And still Spink chuckled and paid out the twine, until suddenly the boat ran into a still deeper darkness.

"Easy, boy," said the skipper, with a strange note of exultation in his voice. "Easy, we're there now."

As he spoke the boat ground up against the side of the derelict, and Lim'us turned about on the thwart and touched the iron plates with his hand.

"If you let a yell out of you," said the captain, "I'll cut your throat from ear to ear."

But indeed Lim'us was incapable of yelling. All he could do was to gasp, and he did that as effectively as if he was a bonito with the grains in him. And the boat drifted towards the vessel's bows, while Spink looked for the easiest way on board.

"They ran like rats," said Spink. "Oh, I know the way they ran. They got on board the other boat, and think this one is now surprisin' the cod-fish."

They reached the bows at last, and came round on the port side, and there Spink found what he looked for. The vessel had been cut down to within six inches of the water's edge about forty feet aft from the bow.

"Just as I laid it out in my mind," said Spink. "Catch hold you, while I get on board."

He dropped about ten fathoms of the twine into the water, and with the rest of the ball in his pocket he scrambled up the horrid gash in the derelict's side and got on deck. He walked for'ard and got the twine clear out on the starboard side, pointing for the unconscious mate. Then he made it fast and took a look at his new command. In spite of the fog it was not difficult to see that she was a fine new boat of about two thousand tons, built and fitted, as was pretty

obvious from her derricks, for a fast freight-boat. It was equally obvious that the whole crew had evacuated her in a panic, for Spink found the skipper's berth with the bed-clothes on the floor, along with a sad and derelict pair of trousers. The "old man" had evidently been in his bunk instead of being on the bridge, and, so far as Spink could see, he had stayed to grab nothing but the ship's papers, without which there can be no maritime salvation.

"This will be a very valuable salvage job," said Spink, as he licked his lips after taking a pull at a bottle of whisky which he found only too handy to the lips of the former skipper. "There's money in this, oh, lots of it. And now I'll show Ward where my luck comes in. And I'll have old Mac and Calder patch up that rent in her before it comes on to blow again."

He put the bottle in his pocket and went for'ard, feeling a deal more proud than if he owned a fleet. For the deserted steamer, the name of which was the *Winchelsea* of Liverpool, was a direct proof that his luck was still what it had been. He found the end of the twine, and hauled in the slack very cautiously.

"I wish I could see his face," said Spink, as he gave the twine a yank which made Ward sit up suddenly and wonder what had happened to him.

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Ward. And then Spink gave the line another yank which almost started Ward on an ice run for the water. But this time he found out what was the matter, and laid hold of the twine.

"Who the devil's pulling my leg?" he roared in such stentorian tones that the whole crowd woke up instantly.

"I am," said Spink. "And I'll thank you to pay attention, and not lie there snoring while I do all the work."

"Where are you?" said Ward. "I can't see you."

"Where d'ye think I am?" asked Spink. "While you were asleep I went out and looked for a new job and found it."

As he spoke there were sudden signs of dawn, and once more the curtain of the mist rolled away, and the late crew of the *Swan* saw a big steamer within fifty feet of them, with the late skipper of the *Swan* leaning over her side smoking his morning pipe.

"Jerusalem!" said the crew, and they shook their heads with amazement, while Ward scratched his. Day whistled,

old Mac burst into joyful tears, and Billings used some awful language to show his gratitude. And Spink said :

"When you have washed and shaved and put on clean collars, I should be much obliged by your coming on board and doing enough work to melt the hoar-frost that's on you. Limehouse, scull over to the berg, and look slippy about it."

In ten minutes they all found themselves on board, and Mac and Calder set to work before breakfast, to patch her up. The engines and furnaces were still warm, and it took little time to get up steam. But Ward took some to get up his. As he said, it was a fair knock-out, and it seemed like some black magic on the part of the skipper, who walked the bridge after breakfast as if he owned the whole North Atlantic.

"She was bound for England, and we'll go home," said Spink. "And as soon as maybe we'll find out what's in her. This is my first salvage, and it's goin' to be a good one."

"You're a wonder," said Ward.

"Didn't I always say so?" replied Spink modestly. "And now I hope that you and Day will behave yourselves, and not trade on any weaknesses that I may have, for I won't put up with it if you do."

"How do you propose to stop it?" asked Day. "You can't plug me or Ward any better now than you could before. Why don't you behave? Then there would be no trouble. I'm fair sick of hearin' about your unfortunate disposition."

"So am I," said Ward.

Spink shook his head with disgust.

"And this kind of talk after what I've done," he said. "I wish you would read old Kelly's little book on the Mate and His Duties, Ward. It would teach you how to behave."

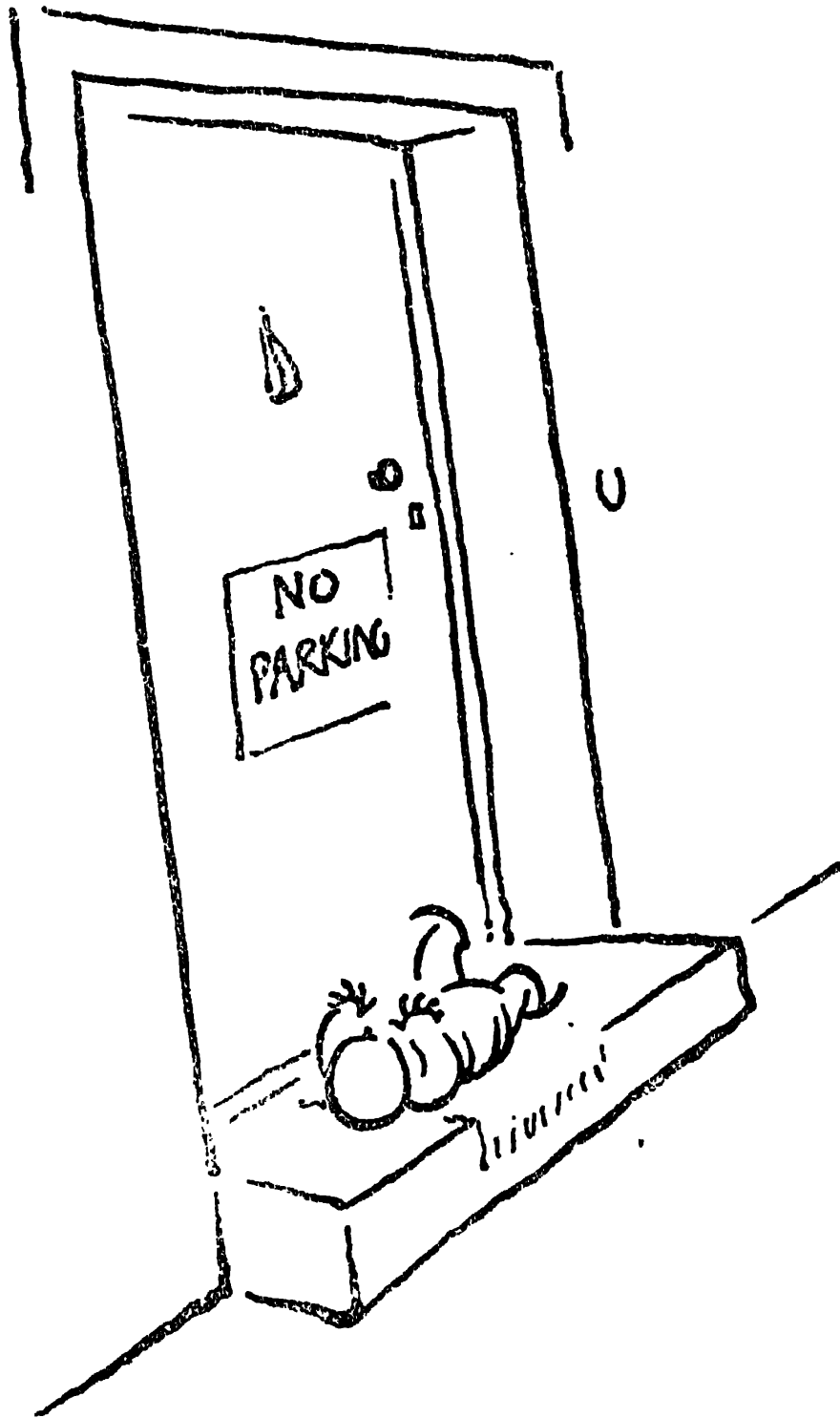
"I had it in the *Snan*," said Ward, "but though it had a lot in it about land-saints and sea-devils, there was nothin' in it that fitted a man like you."

"Perhaps not," said Spink thoughtfully. "I own I'm rare, I'm very rare."

The fog cleared right off, and the sun shone and the calm sea sparkled. In such happy circumstances everyone ought to have been happy, but Spink said he wasn't.

"I wish I wasn't so rare," said Spink.

CAROLINE'S CHRISTMAS



STEPHEN LEACOCK

In his serious moments STEPHEN LEACOCK is a professor of Political Economy at McGill University, Montreal, but he is far better known to the world as a parodist and writer of delightful humorous sketches. Of these he has published, *Literary Lapses*, *Nonsense Novels* and many other volumes.

CAROLINE'S CHRISTMAS

IT was Xmas—Xmas with its mantle of white snow, scintillating from a thousand diamond points, Xmas with its good cheer, its peace on earth—Xmas with its feasting and merriment, Xmas with its—well, anyway, it was Xmas.

Or no, that's a slight slip ; it wasn't exactly Xmas, it was Xmas Eve, Xmas Eve with its mantle of white snow lying beneath the calm moonlight—and, in fact, with practically the above list of accompanying circumstances with a few obvious emendations.

Yes, it was Xmas Eve.

And more than that !

Listen to *where* it was Xmas.

It was Xmas Eve on the Old Homestead. Reader, do you know, by sight, the Old Homestead ? In the pauses of your work at your city desk, where you have grown rich and avaricious, does it never rise before your mind's eye, the quiet old homestead that knew you as a boy before your greed of gold tore you away from it ? The Old Homestead that stands beside the road just on the rise of the hill, with its dark spruce trees wrapped in snow, the snug barns and straw stacks behind it ; while from its windows there streams a shaft of light from a coal-oil lamp, about as thick as a slate pencil that you can see four miles away, from the other side of the cedar swamp in the hollow. Don't talk to me of your modern searchlights and your incandescent arcs, beside that gleam of light from the coal-oil lamp in the farmhouse window. It will shine clear to the heart across thirty years of distance. Do you not turn, I say, sometimes, reader, from the roar and hustle of the city with its ill-gotten wealth and its godless creed of mammon, to think of the quiet homestead under the brow of the hill ? You don't ! Well, you skunk !

It was Xmas Eve.

The light shone from the windows of the homestead farm.

The light of the log fire rose and flickered and mingled its red glare on the windows with the calm yellow of the lamplight.

John Enderby and his wife sat in the kitchen room of the farmstead. Do you know it, reader, the room called the kitchen?—with the open fire on its old brick hearth, and the cook-stove in the corner. It is the room of the farm where people cook and eat and live. It is the living-room. The only other room beside the bedroom is the small room in front, chill-cold in winter, with an organ in it for playing “Rock of Ages” on, when company came. But this room is only used for music and funerals. The real room of the old farm is the kitchen. Does it not rise up before you, reader? It doesn’t? Well, you darn fool!

At any rate there sat old John Enderby beside the plain deal table, his head bowed upon his hands, his grizzled face with its unshorn stubble stricken down with the lines of devastating trouble. From time to time he rose and cast a fresh stick of tamarack into the fire with a savage thud that sent a shower of sparks up the chimney. Across the fireplace sat his wife Anna on a straight-backed chair, looking into the fire with the mute resignation of her sex.

What was wrong with them anyway? Ah, reader, can you ask? Do you know or remember so little of the life of the old homestead? When I have said that it is the Old Homestead and Xmas Eve, and that the farmer is in great trouble and throwing tamarack at the fire, surely you ought to guess!

The Old Homestead was mortgaged! Ten years ago, reckless with debt, crazed with remorse, mad with despair and persecuted with rheumatism, John Enderby had mortgaged his farmstead for twenty-four dollars and thirty cents.

To-night the mortgage fell due, to-night at midnight, Xmas night. Such is the way in which mortgages of this kind are always drawn. Yes, sir, it was drawn with such diabolical skill that on this night of all nights the mortgage would be foreclosed. At midnight the men would come with hammer and nails and foreclose it, nail it up tight.

So the afflicted couple sat.

Anna, with the patient resignation of her sex, sat silent or at times endeavoured to read. She had taken down from the little wall-shelf Bunyan’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying*. She

tried to read it. She could not. Then she had taken Dante's *Inferno*. She could not read it. Then she had selected Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. But she could not read it either. Lastly, she had taken the Farmer's Almanac for 1911. The books lay littered about her as she sat in patient despair.

John Enderby showed all the passion of an uncontrolled nature. At times he would reach out for the crock of buttermilk that stood beside him and drained a draught of the maddening liquid, till his brain glowed like the coals of the tamarack fire before him.

"John," pleaded Anna, "leave alone the buttermilk. It only maddens you. No good ever came of that."

"Aye, lass," said the farmer, with a bitter laugh, as he buried his head again in the crock, "what care I if it maddens me."

"Ah, John, you'd better be employed in reading the Good Book than in your wild courses. Here take it, father, and read it"—and she handed to him the well-worn black volume from the shelf. Enderby paused a moment and held the volume in his hand. He and his wife had known nothing of religious teaching in the public schools of their day, but the first-class non-sectarian education that the farmer had received had stood him in good stead.

"Take the book," she said. "Read, John, in this hour of affliction; it brings comfort."

The farmer took from her hand the well-worn copy of Euclid's *Elements*, and laying aside his hat with reverence, he read aloud: "The angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, and whosoever shall produce the sides, lo, the same also shall be equal each unto each."

The farmer put the book aside.

"It's no use, Anna. I can't read the good words to-night."

He rose, staggered to the crock of buttermilk, and before his wife could stay his hand, drained it to the last drop.

Then he sank heavily to his chair.

"Let them foreclose it, if they will," he said; "I am past caring."

The woman looked sadly into the fire.

Ah, if only her son Henry had been here. Henry, who had left them three years ago, and whose bright letters still brought from time to time the gleam of hope to the stricken farmhouse.

Henry was in Sing Sing. His letters brought news to his mother of his steady success ; first in the baseball nine of the prison, a favourite with his wardens and the chaplain, the best bridge player of the corridor. Henry was pushing his way to the front with the old-time spirit of the Enderbys.

His mother had hoped that he might have been with her at Xmas, but Henry had written that it was practically impossible for him to leave Sing Sing. He could not see his way out. The authorities were arranging a dance and sleighing party for the Xmas celebration. He had some hope, he said, of slipping away unnoticed, but his doing so might excite attention.

Of the trouble at home Anna had told her son nothing.

No, Henry could not come. There was no help there. And William, the other son, ten years older than Henry. Alas, William had gone forth from the old homestead to fight his way in the great city ! "Mother," he had said, "when I make a million dollars I'll come home. Till then good-bye," and he had gone.

How Anna's heart had beat for him. Would he make that million dollars ? Would she ever live to see it ? And as the years passed she and John had often sat in the evenings picturing William at home again, bringing with him a million dollars, or picturing the million dollars sent by express with love. But the years had passed. William came not. He did not come. The great city had swallowed him up as it has many another lad from the old homestead.

Anna started from her musing——

What was that at the door ? The sound of a soft and timid rapping, and through the glass of the door-pane, a face, a woman's face looking into the fire-lit room with pleading eyes. What was it she bore in her arms, the little bundle that she held tight to her breast to shield it from the falling snow ? Can you guess, reader ? Try three guesses and see. Right you are. That's what it was.

The farmer's wife went hastily to the door.

"Lord's mercy !" she cried, "what are you doing out on such a night ? Come in, child, to the fire !"

The woman entered, carrying the little bundle with her, and looking with wide eyes (they were at least an inch and a half across) at Enderby and his wife. Anna could see that there was no wedding-ring on her hand.

"Your name?" said the farmer's wife.

"My name is Caroline," the girl whispered. The rest was lost in the low tones of her voice. "I want shelter," she paused, "I want you to take the child."

Anna took the baby and laid it carefully on the top shelf of the cupboard, then she hastened to bring a glass of water and a dough-nut, and set it before the half-frozen girl.

"Eat," she said, "and warm yourself."

John rose from his seat.

"I'll have no child of that sort here," he said.

"John, John," pleaded Anna, "remember what the Good Book says: 'Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another!'"

John sank back in his chair.

And why had Caroline no wedding-ring? Ah, reader, can you not guess. Well, you can't. It wasn't what you think at all; so there. Caroline had no wedding-ring because she had thrown it away in bitterness, as she tramped the streets of the great city. "Why," she cried, "should the wife of a man in the penitentiary wear a ring?"

Then she had gone forth with the child from what had been her home.

It was the old sad story.

She had taken the baby and laid it tenderly, gently on a seat in the park. Then she walked rapidly away. A few minutes after a man had chased after Caroline with the little bundle in his arms. "I beg your pardon," he said, panting, "I think you left your baby in the park." Caroline thanked him.

Next she took the baby to the Grand Central Waiting-room, kissed it tenderly, and laid it on a shelf behind the lunch-counter.

A few minutes later an official, beaming, with satisfaction, had brought it back to her.

"Yours, I think, madame," he said, as he handed it to her. Caroline thanked him.

Then she had left it at the desk of the Waldorf Astoria, and at the ticket-office of the subway.

It always came back.

Once or twice she took it to Brooklyn Bridge and threw it into the river, but perhaps something in the way it fell through the air touched the mother's heart and smote her, and she had descended to the river and fished it out.

Then Caroline had taken the child to the country. At first she thought to leave it on the wayside and she had put it down in the snow, and standing a little distance off had thrown mullein stalks at it, but something in the way the little bundle lay covered in the snow appealed to the mother's heart.

She picked it up and went on. "Somewhere," she murmured, "I shall find a door of kindness open to it." Soon after she had staggered into the homestead.

Anna, with true woman's kindness, asked no questions. She put the baby carefully away in a trunk, saw Caroline safely to bed in the best room, and returned to her seat beside the fire.

The old clock struck twenty minutes past eight.

Again a knock sounded at the door.

There entered the familiar figure of the village lawyer. His astrachan coat of yellow dogskin, his celluloid collar, and boots which reached no higher than the ankle, contrasted with the rude surroundings of the little room.

"Enderby," he said, "can you pay?"

"Lawyer Perkins," said the farmer, "give me time and I will; so help me, give me five years more and I'll clear this debt to the last cent."

"John," said the lawyer, touched in spite of his rough (dogskin) exterior, "I couldn't, if I would. These things are not what they were. It's a big New York corporation, Pinchem & Company, that makes these loans now, and they take their money on the day, or they sell you up. I can't help it. So there's your notice, John, and I am sorry! No, I'll take no buttermilk, I must keep a clear head to work," and with that he hurried out into the snow again.

John sat brooding in his chair.

The fire flickered down.

The old clock struck half-past eight, then it half struck a quarter to nine, then slowly it struck striking.

Presently Enderby rose, picked a lantern from its hook, "Mortgage or no mortgage," he said, "I must see to the stock."

He passed out of the house, and standing in the yard, looked over the snow to the cedar swamp beyond with the snow winding through it, far in the distance the lights of the village far away.

He thought of the forty years he had spent here on the homestead—the rude, pioneer days—the house he had built for himself, with its plain furniture, the old-fashioned spinning-wheel on which Anna had spun his trousers, the wooden telephone and the rude skidway on which he ate his meals.

He looked out over the swamp and sighed.

Down in the swamp, two miles away, could he but have seen it, there moved a sleigh, and in it a man dressed in a sealskin coat and silk hat, whose face beamed in the moonlight as he turned to and fro and stared at each object by the roadside as at an old familiar scene. Round his waist was a belt containing a million dollars in gold coin, and as he halted his horse in an opening of the road he unstrapped the belt and counted the coins.

Beside him there crouched in the bushes at the dark edge of the swamp road, with eyes that watched every glitter of the coins, and a hand that grasped a heavy cudgel of blackthorn, a man whose close-cropped hair and hard lined face belonged nowhere but within the walls of Sing Sing.

When the sleigh started again the man in the bushes followed doggedly in its track.

Meantime John Enderby had made the rounds of his out-buildings. He bedded the fat cattle that blinked in the flashing light of the lantern. He stood a moment among his hogs, and, farmer as he was, forgot his troubles a moment to speak to each, calling them by name. It smote him to think how at times he had been tempted to sell one of the hogs, or even to sell the cattle to clear the mortgage off the place. Thank God, however, he had put that temptation behind him.

As he reached the house a sleigh was standing on the roadway. Anna met him at the door. "John," she said, "there was a stranger came while you were in the barn, and wanted a lodging for the night; a city man, I reckon, by his clothes. I hated to refuse him, and I put him in Willie's room. We'll never want it again, and he's gone to sleep."

"Ay, we can't refuse."

John Enderby took out the horse to the barn, and then returned to his vigil with Anna beside the fire.

The fumes of the buttermilk had died out of his brain. He was thinking, as he sat there, of midnight and what it would bring.

In the room above, the man in the sealskin coat had thrown himself down, clothes and all, upon the bed, tired with his drive.

"How it all comes back to me," he muttered as he fell asleep, "the same old room, nothing changed—except them—how worn they look," and a tear started to his eyes. He thought of his leaving his home fifteen years ago, of his struggle in the great city, of the great idea he had conceived of making money, and of the Farm Investment Company he had instituted—the simple system of applying the crushing power of capital to exact the uttermost penny from the farm loans. And now here he was back again, true to his word, with a million dollars in his belt. "To-morrow," he had murmured, "I will tell them. It will be Xmas." Then William—yes, reader, it was William (see line 503 above) had fallen asleep.

The hours passed, and kept passing.

It was 11.30.

Then suddenly Anna started from her place.

"Henry!" she cried as the door opened and a man entered. He advanced gladly to meet her, and in a moment mother and son were folded in a close embrace. It was Henry, the man from Sing Sing. True to his word, he had slipped away unostentatiously at the height of the festivities.

"Alas, Henry," said the mother after the warmth of the first greetings had passed, "you come at an unlucky hour." They told him of the mortgage on the farm and the ruin of his home.

"Yes," said Anna, "not even a bed to offer you," and she spoke of the strangers who had arrived; of the stricken woman and the child, and the rich man in the sealskin coat who had asked for a night's shelter.

Henry listened intently while they told him of the man, and a sudden light of intelligence flashed into his eye.

"By Heaven, father, I have it!" he cried. Then dropping his voice, he said, "Speak low, father. This man upstairs, he had a sealskin coat and silk hat?"

"Yes," said the father.

"Father," said Henry, "I saw a man sitting in a sleigh in the cedar swamp. He had money in his hand, and he counted it, and chuckled—five-dollar gold pieces—in all, 1,125,465 dollars and a quarter."

The father and son looked at one another.

"I see your idea," said Enderby sternly.

"We'll choke him," said Henry.

"Or club him," said the farmer, "and pay the mortgage."

Anna looked from one to the other, joy and hope struggling with the sorrow in her face. "Henry, my Henry," she said proudly, "I knew he would find a way."

"Come on," said Henry; "bring the lamp, mother, take the club, father," and gaily, but with hushed voices, the three stole up the stairs.

The stranger lay sunk in sleep. The back of his head was turned to them as they came in.

"Now, mother," said the farmer firmly, "hold the lamp a little nearer; just behind the ear, I think, Henry."

"No," said Henry, rolling back his sleeve and speaking with the quick authority that sat well upon him, "across the jaw, father, it's quicker and neater."

"Well, well," said the farmer, smiling proudly, "have your own way, lad, you know best."

Henry raised the club.

But as he did so—stay, what was that? Far away behind the cedar swamp the deep booming of the bell of the village church began to strike out midnight. One, two, three, its tones came clear across the crisp air. Almost at the same moment the clock below began with deep strokes to mark the midnight hour; from the farmyard chicken coop a rooster began to crow twelve times, while the loud lowing of the cattle and the soft cooing of the hogs seemed to usher in the morning of Christmas with its message of peace and goodwill.

The club fell from Henry's hand and rattled on the floor.

The sleeper woke, and sat up.

"Father! Mother!" he cried.

"My son, my son," sobbed the father, "we had guessed it was you. We had come to wake you."

"Yes, it is I," said William, smiling to his parents, "and I have brought the million dollars. Here it is," and with that he unstrapped the belt from his waist and laid a million dollars on the table.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Anna, "our troubles are at an end. This money will help clear the mortgage—and the greed of Pinchem & Co. cannot harm us now."

"The farm was mortgaged!" said William, aghast.

"Ay," said the farmer, "mortgaged to men who have no conscience, whose greedy hand has nearly brought us to the grave. See how she has aged, my boy," and he pointed to Anna.

"Father," said William, in deep tones of contrition, "I am Pinchem & Co. Heaven help me! I see it now. I see at what expense of suffering my fortune was made. I will restore it all, these million dollars, to those I have wronged."

"No," said his mother softly. "You repent, dear son, with true Christian repentance. That is enough. You may keep the money. We will look upon it as a trust, a sacred trust, and every time we spend a dollar of it on ourselves we will think of it as a trust."

"Yes," said the farmer softly, "your mother is right, the money is a trust, and we will restock the farm with it, buy out the Jones's property, and regard the whole thing as a trust."

At this moment the door of the room opened. A woman's form appeared. It was Caroline, robed in one of Anna's *directoire* nightgowns.

"I heard your voices," she said, and then, as she caught sight of Henry, she gave a great cry.

"My husband!"

"My wife," said Henry, and folded her to his heart.

"You have left Sing Sing?" cried Caroline with joy.

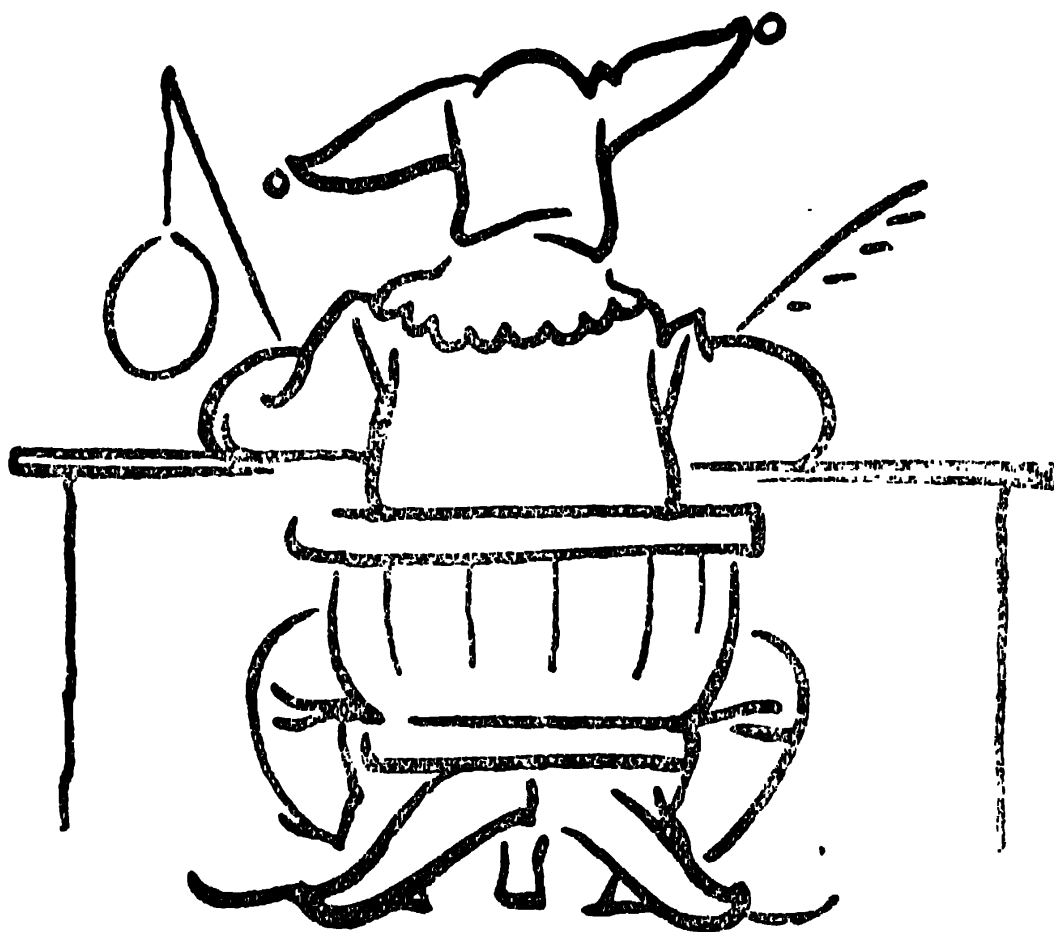
"Yes, Caroline," said Henry. "I shall never go back."

Gaily the reunited family descended. Anna carried the lamp, Henry carried the club. William carried the million dollars.

The tamarack fire roared again upon the hearth. The buttermilk circulated from hand to hand. William and Henry told and retold the story of their adventures. The first streak of the Christmas morn fell through the door-pane.

"Ah, my sons," said John Enderby, "henceforth let us stick to the narrow path. What is it that the Good Book says: 'A straight line is that which lies evenly between its extreme points.'"

THE FACTS



RING LARDNER

RING LARDNER in his capacity as a reporter and journalist on several of America's most important newspapers gathered a great deal of material which he embodied in many of his short stories. These have now been collected together under the title of *Round-up*, the publication of which has gained him much posthumous fame.

THE FACTS

I

THE engagement was broken off before it was announced. So only a thousand or so of the intimate friends and relatives of the parties knew anything about it. What they knew was that there had been an engagement and that there was one no longer. The cause of the breach they merely guessed, and most of the guesses were, in most particulars, wrong.

Each intimate and relative had a fragment of the truth. It remained for me to piece the fragments together. It was a difficult job, but I did it. Part of my evidence is hearsay; the major portion is fully corroborated. And not one of my witnesses had anything to gain through perjury.

So I am positive that I have at my tongue's end the facts, and I believe that in justice to everybody concerned I should make them public.

Ellen McDonald had lived on the North Side of Chicago for twenty-one years. Billy Bowen had been a South-Sider for seven years longer. But neither knew of the other's existence until they met in New York, the night before the Army-Navy game.

Billy, sitting with a business acquaintance at a neighbouring table in Tonio's, was spotted by a male member of Ellen's party, a Chicagoan, too. He was urged to come on over. He did, and was introduced. The business acquaintance was also urged, came, was introduced and forgotten; forgotten, that is, by every one but the waiter, who observed that he danced not nor told stories, and figured that his function must be to pay. The business acquaintance had been Billy's guest. Now he became host, and without seeking the office.

It was not that Billy and Miss McDonald's male friends were niggards. But unfortunately for the b. a., the checks always happened to arrive when everybody else was dancing

or so hysterical over Billy's repartee as to be potentially insolvent.

Billy was somewhere between his fourteenth and twenty-first highball; in other words, at his best, from the audience's standpoint. His dialogue was simply screaming and his dancing just heavenly. He was Frank Tinney doubling as Vernon Castle. On the floor he tried and accomplished twinkles that would have spelled catastrophe if attempted under the fourteen mark, or over the twenty-one. And he said the cutest things—one right after the other.

II

You can be charmed by a man's dancing, but you can't fall in love with his funniness. If you're going to fall in love with him at all, you'll do it when you catch him in a serious mood.

Miss McDonald caught Billy Bowen in one at the game next day. Entirely by accident or a decree of fate, her party and his sat in adjoining boxes. Not by accident, Miss McDonald sat in the chair that was nearest Billy's. She sat there first to be amused; she stayed to be conquered.

Here was a different Billy from the Billy of Tonio's. Here was a Billy who trained his gun on your heart and let your risibles alone. Here was a dreamy Billy, a Billy of romance.

How calm he remained through the excitement! How indifferent to the thrills of the game! There was depth to him. He was a man. Her escort and the others round her were children, screaming with delight at the puerile deeds of pseudo heroes. Football was a great sport, but a sport. It wasn't Life. Would the world be better or worse for that nine-yard gain that Elephant or Oliphant, or whatever his name was, had just made? She knew it wouldn't. Billy knew, too, for Billy was deep. He was thinking man's thoughts. She could tell by his silence, by his inattention to the scene before him. She scarcely could believe that here was the same person who, last night, had kept his own, yes, and the neighbouring tables, roaring with laughter. What a complex character his!

In sooth, Mr. Bowen was thinking man's thoughts. He was thinking that if this pretty Miss McDowell, or Donnelly,

were elsewhere, he could go to sleep. And that if he could remember which team he had bet on and could tell which team was which, he would have a better idea of whether he was likely to win or lose.

When, after the game, they parted, Billy rallied to the extent of asking permission to call. Ellen, it seemed, would be very glad to have him, but she couldn't tell exactly when she would have to be back in Chicago; she still had three more places to visit in the East. Could she possibly let him know when she did get back? Yes, she could and would; if he really wanted her to, she would drop him a note. He certainly wanted her to.

This, thought Billy, was the best possible arrangement. Her note would tell him her name and address, and save him the trouble of phoning to all the McConnells, McDowell's, and Donnellys on the North Side. He did want to see her again; she was pretty, and, judging from last night, full of pep. And she had fallen for him; he knew it from that look.

He watched her until she was lost in the crowd. Then he hunted round for his pals and the car that had brought them up. At length he gave up the search and wearily climbed the elevated stairs. His hotel was on Broadway, near Forty-fourth. He left the train at Forty-second, the third time it stopped there.

"I guess you've rode far enough," said the guard. "Fifteen cents' worth for a nickel. I guess we ought to have a Pullman on these here trains."

"I guess," said Billy, "I guess——"

But the repartee well was dry. He stumbled downstairs and hurried toward Broadway to replenish it.

III

Ellen McDonald's three more places to visit in the East must have been deadly dull. Anyway, on the sixth of December scarcely more than a week after his parting with her in New York, Billy Bowen received the promised note. It informed him merely that her name was Ellen McDonald, that she lived at so-and-so Walton Place, and that she was back in Chicago.

That day, you'll remember, was Monday. Miss McDonald's parents had tickets for the opera. But Ellen was honestly

just worn out, and would they be mad at her if she stayed home and went to bed? They wouldn't. They would take Aunt Mary in her place.

On Tuesday morning, Paul Potter called up and wanted to know if she would go with him that night to "The Follies". She was horribly sorry, but she'd made an engagement. The engagement, evidently was to study, and the subject was harmony, with Berlin, Kern, and Van Alstyne as instructors. She sat on the piano-bench from half-past seven till quarter after nine, and then went to her room, vowing that she would accept any and all invitations for the following evening.

Fortunately, no invitations arrived, for at a quarter to nine Wednesday night, Mr. Bowen did. And in a brand-new mood. He was a bit shy and listened more than he talked. But when he talked, he talked well, though the sparkling wit of the night at Tonio's was lacking. Lacking, too, was the preoccupied air of the day at the football game. There was no problem to keep his mind busy, but even if the Army and Navy had been playing football in this very room, he could have told at a glance which was which. Vision and brain were perfectly clear. And he had been getting his old eight hours, and, like the railroad hen, sometimes nine and sometimes ten, every night since his arrival home from Gotham, N. Y. Mr. Bowen was on the wagon.

They talked of the East, of Tonio's, of the game (this was where Billy did most of his listening), of the war, of theatres, of books, of college, of automobiles, of the market. They talked, too, of their immediate families. Billy's, consisting of one married sister in South Bend, was soon exhausted. He had two cousins here in town whom he saw frequently, two cousins and their wives, but they were people who simply couldn't stay home nights. As for himself, he preferred his rooms and a good book to the so-called gay life. Ellen should think that a man who danced so well would want to be doing it all the time. It was nice of her to say that he danced well, but really he didn't, you know. Oh, yes, he did. She guessed she could tell. Well, anyway, the giddy whirl made no appeal to him, unless, of course, he was in particularly charming company. His avowed love for home and quiet surprised Ellen a little. It surprised Mr. Bowen a great deal. Only last night, he remembered, he had been driven almost desperate by that quiet of which

he was now so fond ; he had been on the point of busting loose, but had checked himself in time. He had played Canfield till ten, though the book-shelves were groaning with their load.

Ellen's family kept them busy for an hour and a half. It was a dear family and she wished he could meet it. Mother and father were out playing bridge somewhere to-night. Aunt Mary had gone to bed. Aunts Louise and Harriet lived in the next block. Sisters Edith and Wilma would be home from Northampton for the holidays about the twentieth. Brother Bob and his wife had built the cutest house in Evanston. Her younger brother, Walter, was a case ! He was away to-night, had gone out right after dinner. He'd better be in before mother and father came. He had a new love-affair every week, and sixteen years old last August. Mother and father really didn't care how many girls he was interested in, so long as they kept him too busy to run round with those crazy schoolmates of his. The latter were older than he ; just at the age when it seems smart to drink beer and play cards for money. Father said if he ever found out that Walter was doing those things, he'd take him out of school and lock him up somewhere.

Aunts Louise and Mary and Harriet did a lot of settlement work. They met all sorts of queer people, people you'd never believe existed. The three aunts were unmarried.

Brother Bob's wife was a dear, but absolutely without a sense of humour. Bob was full of fun, but they got along just beautifully together. You never saw a couple so much in love.

Edith was on the basket-ball team at college and terribly popular. Wilma was horribly clever and everybody said she'd make Phi Beta Kappa.

Ellen, so she averred, had been just nothing in school ; not bright ; not athletic, and, of course, not popular.

"Oh, of course not," said Billy, smiling.

"Honestly," fibbed Ellen.

"You never could make me believe it," said Billy.

Whereat Ellen blushed, and Billy's unbelief strengthened.

At this crisis, the Case burst into the room with his hat on. He removed it at sight of the caller and awkwardly advanced to be introduced.

"I'm going to bed," he announced, after the formality.

"I hoped," said Ellen, "you'd tell us about the latest. Who is it now? Beth?"

"Beth nothing!" scoffed the Case. "We split up the day of the Keewatin game."

"What was the matter?" asked his sister.

"I'm going to bed," said the Case. "It's pretty near midnight."

"By George, it is!" exclaimed Billy. "I didn't dream it was that late!"

"No," said Walter. "That's what I tell dad—the clock goes along some when you're having a good time."

Billy and Ellen looked shyly at each other, and then laughed; laughed harder, it seemed to Walter, than the joke warranted. In fact, he hadn't thought of it as a joke. If it was that good, he'd spring it on Kathryn to-morrow night. It would just about clinch her.

The Case, carrying out his repeated threat, went to bed and dreamed of Kathryn. Fifteen minutes later Ellen retired to dream of Billy. And an hour later than that, Billy was dreaming of Ellen, who had become suddenly popular with him, even if she hadn't been so at Northampton, which he didn't believe.

IV

They saw "The Follies" Friday night. A criticism of the show by either would have been the greatest folly of all. It is doubtful that they could have told what theatre they'd been to ten minutes after they'd left it. From wherever it was, they walked to a dancing place and danced. Ellen was so far gone that she failed to note the change in Billy's trotting. Foxes would have blushed for shame at its awkwardness and lack of variety. If Billy was a splendid dancer, he certainly did not prove it this night. All he knew or cared to know was that he was with the girl he wanted. And she knew only that she was with Billy, and happy.

On the drive home, the usual superfluous words were spoken. They were repeated inside the storm-door at Ellen's father's house, while the taxi driver, waiting, wondered audibly why them suckers of explorers beat it to the Pole to freeze when the North Side was so damn handy.

Ellen's father was out of town. So in the morning she

broke the news to mother and Aunt Mary, and then sat down and wrote it to Edith and Wilma. Next she called up Bob's wife in Evanston, and after that she hurried to the next block and sprang it on Aunts Louise and Harriet. It was decided that Walter had better not be told. He didn't know how to keep a secret. Walter, therefore, was in ignorance till he got home from school. The only person he confided in the same evening was Kathryn, who was the only person he saw.

Bob and his wife and Aunts Louise and Harriet came to Sunday dinner, but were chased home early in the afternoon. Mr. McDonald was back and Billy was coming to talk to him. It would embarrass Billy to death to find such a crowd in the house. They'd all meet him soon, never fear, and when they met him, they'd be crazy about him. Bob and Aunt Mary and mother would like him because he was so bright and said such screaming things, and the rest would like him because he was so well-read and sensible, and so horribly good-looking.

Billy, I said, was coming to talk to Mr. McDonald. When he came, he did very little of the talking. He stated the purpose of his visit, told what business he was in and affirmed his ability to support a wife. Then he assumed the role of audience while Ellen's father delivered an hour's lecture. The speaker did not express his opinion of Tyrus Cobb or the Kaiser, but they were the only subjects he overlooked. Sobriety and industry were words frequently used.

"I don't care," he prevaricated, in conclusion, "how much money a man is making if he is sober and industrious. You attended college, and I presume you did all the fool things college boys do. Some men recover from their college education, others don't. I hope you're one of the former."

The Sunday-night supper, just cold scraps you might say, was partaken of by the happy but embarrassed pair, the trying-to-look happy but unembarrassed parents, and Aunt Mary. Walter, the Case, was out. He had stayed home the previous evening.

"He'll be here to-morrow night and the rest of the week, or I'll know the reason why," said Mr. McDonald.

"He won't, and I'll tell you the reason why," said Ellen.

"He's a real boy, Sam," put in the real boy's mother. "You can't expect him to stay home every minute."

"I can't expect anything of him," said the father. "You and the girls and Mary here have let him have his own way so long that he's past managing. When I was his age, I was in my bed at nine o'clock."

"Morning or night?" asked Ellen.

Her father scowled. It was evident he could not take a joke, not even a good one.

After the cold scraps had been ruined, Mr. McDonald drew Billy into the smoking-room and offered him a cigar. The prospective son-in-law was about to refuse and express a preference for cigarettes when something told him not to. A moment later he was deeply grateful to the something.

"I smoke three cigars a day," said the oracle, "one after each meal. That amount of smoking will hurt nobody. More than that is too much. I used to smoke to excess, four or five cigars per day, and maybe a pipe or two. I found it was affecting my health, and I cut down. Thank heaven, no one in my family ever got the cigarette habit; disease, rather. How any sane, clean-minded man can start on those things is beyond me."

"Me, too," agreed Billy, taking the proffered cigar with one hand and making sure with the other that his silver pill-case was as deep down in his pocket as it would go.

"Cigarettes, gambling, and drinking go hand in hand," continued the man of the house. "I couldn't trust a cigarette fiend with a nickel."

"There are only two or three kinds he could get for that," said Billy.

"What say?" demanded Mr. McDonald, but before Billy was obliged to wriggle out of it, Aunt Mary came in and reminded her brother-in-law that it was nearly church time.

Mr. McDonald and Aunt Mary went to church. Mrs. McDonald, pleading weariness, stayed home with "the children." She wanted a chance to get acquainted with this pleasant-faced boy who was going to rob her of one of her five dearest treasures.

The three were no sooner settled in front of the fireplace than Ellen adroitly brought up the subject of auction bridge, knowing that it would relieve Billy of the conversational burden.

"Mother is really quite a shark, aren't you, mother?" she said.

"I don't fancy being called a fish," said the mother.

"She's written two books on it, and she and father have won so many prizes that they may have to lease a warehouse. If they'd only play for money, just think how rich we'd all be!"

"The game is fascinating enough without adding to it the excitements and evils of gambling," said Mrs. McDonald.

"It is a fascinating game," agreed Billy.

"It is," said Mrs. McDonald, and away she went.

Before father and Aunt Mary got home from church, Mr. Bowen was a strong disciple of conservatism in bidding and thoroughly convinced that all the rules that had been taught were dead wrong. He saw the shark's points so quickly and agreed so whole-heartedly with her arguments that he impressed her as one of the most intelligent young men she had ever talked to. It was too bad it was Sunday night, but some evening soon he must come over for a game.

"I'd like awfully well to read your books," said Billy.

"The first one's usefulness died with the changes in the rules," replied Mrs. McDonald. "But I think I have one of the new ones in the house, and I'll be glad to have you take it."

"I don't like to have you give me your only copy."

"Oh, I believe we have two."

She knew perfectly well she had two dozen.

Aunt Mary announced that Walter had been seen in church with Kathryn. He had made it his business to be seen. He and the lady had come early and had manoeuvred into the third row from the back, on the aisle leading to the McDonald family pew. He had nudged his aunt as she passed on the way to her seat, and she had turned and spoken to him. She could not know that he and Kathryn had "ducked" before the end of the processional.

After reporting favourably on the Case, Aunt Mary launched into a description of the service. About seventy had turned out. The music had been good, but not quite as good as in the morning. Mr. Pratt had sung "Fear Ye Not, O Israel!" for the offertory. Dr. Gish was still sick and a lay reader had served. She had heard from Allie French that Dr. Gish expected to be out by the middle of the week and certainly would be able to preach next Sunday morning.

The church had been cold at first, but very comfortable finally.

Ellen rose and said she and Billy would go out in the kitchen and made some fudge.

"I was afraid Aunt Mary would bore you to death," she told Billy, when they had kissed for the first time since five o'clock. "She just lives for the church and can talk on no other subject."

"I wouldn't hold that against her," said Billy charitably.

The fudge was a failure, as it was bound to be. But the Case, who came in just as it was being passed round, was the only one rude enough to say so.

"Is this a new stunt?" he inquired, when he had tested it.

"Is what a new stunt?" asked Ellen.

"Using cheese instead of chocolate."

"That will do, Walter," said his father. "You can go to bed."

Walter got up and started for the hall. At the threshold he stopped.

"I don't suppose there'll be any of that fudge left," he said. "But if there should be, you'd better put it in the mouse trap."

Billy called a taxi and departed soon after Walter's exit. When he got at his South Side abode, the floor of the tonneau was littered with recent cigarettes.

And that night he dreamed that he was president of the anti-cigarette league; that Dr. Gish was vice-president, and that the motto of the organization was "No trump."

Billy Bowen's business took him out of town the second week in December, and it was not until the twentieth that he returned. He had been East and had ridden home from Buffalo on the same train with Wilma and Edith McDonald. But he didn't know it, and neither did they. They could not be expected to recognize him from Ellen's description—that he was horribly good-looking. The dining-car conductor was all of that. •

Ellen had further written them that he (not the dining-car conductor) was a man of many moods; that sometimes he was just nice and deep, and sometimes he was screamingly funny, and sometimes so serious and silent that she was almost afraid of him.

They were wild to see him and the journey through

Ohio and Indiana would not have been half so long in his company. Edith, the athletic, would have revelled in his wit. Wilma would gleefully have fathomed his depths. They would both have been proud to flaunt his looks before the hundreds of their kind aboard the train. Their loss was greater than Billy's, for he, smoking cigarettes as fast as he could light them and playing bridge that would have brought tears of compassion to the shark's eyes, enjoyed the trip, every minute of it.

Ellen and her father were at the station to meet the girls. His arrival on this train had not been heralded, and it added greatly to the hysterics of the occasion.

Wilma and Edith upbraided him for not knowing by instinct who they were. He accused them of recognizing him and purposely avoiding him. Much more of it was pulled in the same light vein, pro and con.

He was permitted at length to depart for his office. On the way he congratulated himself on the improbability of his ever being obliged to play basket-ball versus Edith. She must be a whizz in condition. Chances were she'd train down to a hundred and ninety-five before the big games. The other one, Wilma, was a splinter if he ever saw one. You had to keep your eyes peeled or you'd miss her entirely. But suppose you did miss her; what then! If she won her Phi Beta Kappa pin, he thought, it would make her a dandy belt.

These two, he thought, were a misdeal. They should be reshuffled and cut nearer the middle of the deck. Lots of other funny things he thought about these two.

Just before he had left Chicago on this trip, his stenographer had quit him to marry an elevator-starter named Felix Bond. He had phoned one of his cousins and asked him to be on the look-out for a live stenographer who wasn't likely to take the eye of an elevator-starter. The cousin had one in mind.

Here was her card on Billy's desk when he reached the office. It was not a business-card visiting-card, at \$3 per hundred. "Miss Violet Moore," the engraved part said. Above was written: "Mr. Bowen—Call me up any night after seven. Calumet 2678."

Billy stowed the card in his pocket and plunged into a pile of uninteresting letters.

On the night of the twenty-second there was a family dinner at McDonald's, and Billy was in on it. At the function he met the rest of them—Bob and his wife, and Aunt Harriet and Aunt Louise.

Bob and his wife, despite the former's alleged sense of humour, spooned every time they were contiguous. That they were in love with each other, as Ellen said, was easy to see. The wherefore was more of a puzzle.

Bob's hirsute adornment having been disturbed by his spouse's digits during one of the orgies, he went upstairs ten minutes before dinner time to effect repairs. Mrs. Bob was left alone on the davenport. In performance of his social duties, Billy went over and sat down beside her. She was not, like Miss Muffet, frightened away, but terror or some other fiend rendered her temporarily dumb. The game Mr. Bowen was making his fifth attempt to pry open a conversation when Bob came back.

To the impartial observer the scene on the davenport appeared heartless enough. There was a generous neutral zone between Billy and Flo, that being an abbreviation of Mrs. Bob's given name, which, as a few may suspect, was Florence. Billy was working hard and his face was flushed with the effort. The flush may have aroused Bob's suspicions. At any rate, he strode across the room, scowling almost audibly, shot a glance at Billy that would have made the Kaiser wince, halted magnificently in front of his wife, and commanded her to accompany him to the hall.

Billy's flush became ace high. He was about to get up and break a chair when a look from Ellen stopped him. She was at his side before the pair of Bobs had skidded out of the room.

"Please don't mind," she begged. "He's crazy. I forgot to tell you that he's insanely jealous."

"Did I understand you to say he had a sense of humour?"

"It doesn't work where Flo's concerned. If he sees her talking to a man he goes wild."

"With astonishment, probably," said Billy.

"You're a nice boy," said Ellen irrelevantly.

Dinner was announced and Mr. Bowen was glad to observe that Flo's terrestrial body was still intact. He was glad too, to note that Bob was no longer frothing. He learned for the first time that the Case and Kathryn were of

the party. Mrs. McDonald had wanted to make sure of Walter's presence; hence the presence of his crush.

Kathryn giggled when she was presented to Billy. It made him uncomfortable and he thought for a moment that a couple of studs had fallen out. He soon discovered, however, that the giggle was permanent, just as much a part of Kathryn as her fraction of a nose. He looked forward with new interest to the soup course, but was disappointed to find that she could negotiate it without disturbing the giggle or the linen.

He next centred his attention on Wilma and Edith. Another disappointment was in store. There were as many and as large oysters in Wilma's soup as in any one's. She ate them all, and, so far as appearances went, was the same Wilma. He had expected that Edith would either diet or plunge. But Edith was as prosaic in her consumption of victuals as Ellen, for instance, or Aunt Louise.

He must content himself for the present with Aunt Louise. She was sitting directly opposite and he had an unobstructed view of the widest part he had ever seen in woman's hair.

"Ogden Avenue," he said to himself.

Aunt Louise was telling about her experiences and Aunt Harriet's among the heathen of Peoria Street.

"You never would dream there were such people!" said she.

"I suppose most of them are foreign born," supposed her brother, who was Mr. McDonald.

"Practically all of them," said Aunt Louise.

Billy wanted to ask her whether she had ever missionaried among the Indians. He thought possibly an attempt to scalp her had failed by a narrow margin.

Between courses Edith worked hard to draw out his predicated comicality and Wilma worked as hard to make him sound his low notes. Their labours were in vain. He was not sleepy enough to be deep, and he was fourteen highballs shy of comedy.

In disgust, perhaps, at her failure to be amused, the major portion of the misdeal capsized her cocoa just before the close of the meal and drew a frown from her father, whom she could have thrown in ten minutes, straight falls, any style.

"She'll never miss that ounce," thought Billy.

When they got up from the table and started for the living-room, Mr. Bowen found himself walking beside Aunt Harriet, who had been so silent during dinner that he had all but forgotten her.

"Well, Miss McDonald," he said, "it's certainly a big family, isn't it?"

"Well, young man," said Aunt Harriet, "it ain't no small family, that's sure."

"I should say not," repeated Billy.

Walter and his giggling crush intercepted him.

"What do you think of Aunt Harriet's grammar?" demanded Walter.

"I didn't notice it," lied Billy.

"No, I s'pose not. 'Ain't no small family.' I s'pose you didn't notice it. She isn't a real aunt like Aunt Louise and Aunt Mary. She's just an adopted aunt. She kept house for dad and Aunt Louise after their mother died, and when dad got married, she just kept on living with Aunt Louise."

"Oh," was Billy's fresh comment, and it brought forth a fresh supply of giggles from Kathryn.

Ellen had already been made aware of Billy's disgusting plans. He had to catch a night train for St. Louis, and he would be there all day to-morrow, and he'd be back Friday, but he wouldn't have time to see her, and he'd surely call her up. And Friday afternoon he was going to South Bend to spend Christmas Day with his married sister, because it was probably the last Christmas he'd be able to spend with her.

"But I'll hustle home from South Bend Sunday morning," he said. "And don't you dare make any engagement for the afternoon."

"I do wish you could be with us Christmas Eve. The tree won't be a bit of fun without you."

"You know I wish I could. But you see how it is."

"I think your sister's mean."

Billy didn't deny it.

"Who's going to be here Christmas Eve?"

"Just the people we had to-night, except Kathryn and you. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Billy.

"Look here, sir," said his betrothed. "Don't you do anything foolish. You're not supposed to buy presents for the whole family. Just a little, tiny one for me, if you want to, but you mustn't spend much on it. And if you get anything for any one else in this house, I'll be mad."

"I'd like to see you mad," said Billy.

"You'd wish you hadn't," Ellen retorted.

When Billy had gone, Ellen returned to the living-room and faced the assembled company.

"Well," she said, "now that you've all seen him, what's the verdict?"

The verdict seemed to be unanimously in his favour.

"But," said Bob, "I thought you said he was so screamingly funny."

"Yes," said Edith, "you told me that, too."

"Give him a chance," said Ellen. "Wait till he's in a funny mood. You'll simply die laughing!"

It is a compound fracture of the rules to have so important a character as Tommy Richards appear in only one chapter. But remember, this isn't a regular story, but a simple statement of what occurred when it occurred. During Chapter Four, Tommy had been on his way home from the Pacific Coast, where business had kept him all autumn. His business out there and what he said en route to Chicago are collateral.

Tommy had been Billy's pal at college. Tommy's home was in Minnesota, and Billy was his most intimate, practically his only friend in the so-called metropolis of the Middle West. So Tommy, not knowing that Billy had gone to St. Louis, looked forward to a few pleasant hours with him between the time of the coast train's arrival and the Minnesota train's departure.

The coast train reached Chicago about noon. It was Thursday noon, the twenty-third. Tommy hustled from the station to Billy's office, and there learned of the St. Louis trip. Disappointed, he roamed the streets a while and at length dropped into the downtown ticket office of his favourite Minnesota road. He was told that everything for the night was sold out. Big Christmas business. Tommy pondered.

The coast train reached Chicago about noon. It was Thursday noon, the twenty-third.

"How about to-morrow night?" he inquired.

"I can give you a lower to-morrow night on the six-thirty," replied Leslie Painter, that being the clerk's name.

"I'll take it," said Tommy. He did so, and the clerk took \$10.50.

"I'll see old Bill after all," said Tommy.

Leslie Painter made no reply.

In the afternoon Tommy sat through a vaudeville show, and at night he looped the loop. He retired early, for the next day promised to be a big one.

Billy got in from St. Louis at seven Friday morning and had been in his office an hour when Tommy appeared. I have no details of the meeting.

At half-past eight Tommy suggested that they'd better go out and h'ist one.

"Still on it, eh?" said Billy.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm off of it."

"Good Lord! For how long?"

"The last day of November."

"Too long! You look sick already."

"I feel great," averred Billy.

"Well, I don't. So come along and bathe in vichy."

On the way "along" Billy told Tommy about Ellen. Tommy's congratulations were physical and jarred Billy from head to heels.

"Good stuff!" cried Tommy so loudly that three pedestrians jumped sideways. "Old Bill hooked! And do you think you're going to celebrate this occasion with water?"

"I think I am," was Billy's firm reply.

"You think you are! What odds?"

"A good lunch against a red hot."

"You're on!" said Tommy. "And I'm going to be mighty hungry at one o'clock."

"You'll be hungry and alone."

"What's the idea? If you've got a lunch date with the future, I'm in on it."

"I haven't," said Billy. "But I'm going to South Bend on the one-forty, and between now and then I have nothing

to do but clean up my mail and buy a dozen Christmas presents."

They turned in somewhere.

"Don't you see the girl at all to-day?" asked Tommy.

"Not to-day. All I do is call her up."

"Well, then, if you get outside of a couple, who'll be hurt? Just for old time's sake."

"If you need lunch money, I'll give it to you."

"No, no. That bet's off."

"It's not off. I won't call it off."

"Suit yourself," said Tommy graciously.

At half-past nine, it was officially decided that Billy had lost the bet. At half-past twelve, Billy said it was time to pay it.

"I'm not hungry enough," said Tommy.

"Hungry or no hungry," said Billy, "I buy your lunch now or I don't buy it. See? Hungry or no hungry?"

"What's the hurry?" asked Tommy.

"I guess you know what's the hurry. Me for South Bend on the one-forty, and I got to go to the office first. Hurry or no hurry."

"Listen to reason, Bill. How are you going to eat lunch, go to the office, buy a dozen Christmas presents and catch the one-forty?"

"Christmas presents! I forgot 'em! What do you think of that? I forgot 'em. Good night!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Do! What can I do? You got me into this mess. Get me out!"

"Sure, I'll get you out if you'll listen to reason!" said Tommy. "Has this one-forty train got anything on you? Are you under obligations to it? Is the engineer your girl's uncle?"

"I guess you know better than that. I guess you know I'm not engaged to a girl who's got an uncle for an engineer."

"Well, then, what's the next train?"

"That's the boy, Tommy! That fixes it! I'll go on the next train."

"You're sure there is one?" asked Tommy.

"Is one! Say, where do you think South Bend is? In Europe?"

"I wouldn't mind," said Tommy.

"South Bend's only a two-hour run. Where did you think it was? Europe?"

"I don't care where it is. The question is, what's the next train after one-forty?"

"Maybe you think I don't know," said Billy. He called the gentleman with the apron. "What do you know about this, Charley? Here's an old pal of mine who thinks I don't know the time-table to South Bend."

"He's mistaken, isn't he?" said Charley.

"Is he mistaken? Say, Charley, if you knew as much as I do about the time-table to South Bend, you wouldn't be here."

"No, sir," said Charley. "I'd be an announcer over in the station."

"There!" said Billy triumphantly. "How's that, Tommy? Do I know the time-table or don't I?"

"I guess you do," said Tommy. "But I don't think you ought to have secrets from an old friend."

"There's no secrets about it, Charley."

"My name is Tommy," corrected his friend.

"I know that. I know your name as well as my own, better'n my own. I know your name as well as I know the time-table."

"If you'd just tell me the time of that train, we'd all be better off."

"I'll tell you, Tommy. I wouldn't hold out anything on you, old boy. It's five twenty-five."

"You're sure?"

"Sure! Say, I've taken it a hundred times if I've taken it once."

"All right," said Tommy. "That fixes it. We'll go in and have lunch and be through by half-past one. That'll give you four hours to do your shopping, get to your office and make your train."

"Where you going while I shop?"

* "Don't bother about me."

"You go along with me."

"Nothing doing."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't."

But this argument was won by Mr. Bowen. At ten minutes of three, when they at last called for the check,

Mr. Richards looked on the shopping expedition in an entirely different light. Two hours before, it had not appealed to him at all. Now he could think of nothing that would afford more real entertainment. Mr. Richards was at a stage corresponding to Billy's twenty-one. Billy was far past it.

"What we better do," said Tommy, "is write down a list of all the people so we won't forget anybody."

"That's the stuff!" said Billy. "I'll name 'em, you write 'em."

So Tommy produced a pencil and took dictation on the back of a menu-card.

"First, girl's father, Sam'l McDonald."

"Samuel McDonald," repeated Tommy. "Maybe you'd better give me some dope on each one, so if we're shy of time, we can both be buying at once."

"All right," said Billy. "First, Sam'l McDonal'. He's an ol' crab. Raves about cig'rettes."

"Like 'em?"

"No. Hates 'em."

"Sam'l McDonald, cigarettes," wrote Tommy. "Old crab," he added.

When the important preliminary arrangement had at last been completed, the two old college chums went out into the air.

"Where do we shop?" asked Tommy.

"Marsh's," said Billy. "'S only place I got charge account."

"Maybe we better take a taxi and save time," suggested Tommy.

So they waited five minutes for a taxi and were driven to Marsh's, two blocks away.

"We'll start on the first floor and work up," said Tommy, who had evidently appointed himself captain.

They found themselves among the jewellery and silverware.

"You might get something for the girl here," suggested Tommy.

"Don't worry 'bout her," said Billy. "Leave her till last."

"What's the limit on the others?"

"I don't care," said Billy. "Dollar, two dollars, three dollars."

"Well, come on," said Tommy. "We got to make it snappy."

But Billy hung back.

"Say, ol' boy," he wheedled. "You're my ol'st frien'. Is that right?"

"That's right," agreed Tommy.

"Well, say, ol' frien', I'm pretty near all in."

"Go home, then, if you want to. I can pull this all right alone."

"Nothin' doin'. But if I could jus' li'l nap, ten, fifteen minutes—you could get couple things here on fir' floor and then come get me."

"Where?"

"Third floor waitin'-room."

"Go ahead. But wait a minute. Give me some of your cards. And will I have any trouble charging things?"

"Not a bit. Tell 'em you're me."

It was thus that Tommy Richards was left alone in a large store, with Billy Bowen's charge account, Billy Bowen's list, and Billy Bowen's cards.

He glanced at the list.

"Samuel McDonald, cigarettes. Old crab," he read.

He approached a floor-walker.

"Say, old pal," he said. "I'm doing some shopping and I'm in a big hurry. Where'd I find something for an old cigarette fiend!"

"Cigarette-cases, two aisles down and an aisle to your left," said Old Pal.

Tommy raised the limit on the cigarette-case he picked out for Samuel McDonald. It was \$3.75.

"I'll cut down somewhere else," he thought. "The father-in-law ought to be favoured a little."

"Charge," he said in response to a query, "William Bowen, Bowen and Company, 18 South La Salle. And here's a card for it. That go out to-night sure?"

• He looked again at the list.

"Mrs. Samuel McDonald, bridge bug. Miss Harriet McDonald, reveres English. Miss Louise McDonald, thin hair. Miss Mary Carey, church stuff. Bob and Wife, 'The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife, and gets mysteriously jealous. Walter McDonald, real kid. Edith, fat lady. Wilma, a splinter."

He consulted Old Pal once more. Old Pal's advice was to go to the third floor and look over the books. The advice proved sound. On the third floor Tommy found for Mother "The First Principles of Auction Bridge," and for Aunt Harriet an English grammar. He also bumped into a counter laden with hymnals, chant books, and Books of Common Prayer.

"Aunt Mary!" he exclaimed. And to the clerk: "How much are your medium prayer-books?"

"What denomination?" asked the clerk, whose name was Freda Swanson.

"One or two dollars," said Tommy.

"What church, I mean?" inquired Freda.

"How would I know?" said Tommy. "Are there different books for different churches?"

"Sure. Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran——"

"Let's see. McDonald, Carey. How much are the Catholic.

"Here's one at a dollar and a half. In Latin, too."

"That's it. That'll give her something to work on."

Tommy figured on the back of his list.

"Good work, Tommy!" he thought. "Four and a half under the top limit for those three. Walter's next."

He plunged on Walter. A nice poker set, discovered on the fourth floor, came to five even. Tommy wished he could keep it for himself. He also wished constantly that the women shoppers had taken a course in dodging. He was almost as badly battered as the day he played guard against the Indians.

"Three left besides the queen herself," he observed. "Lord, no. I forgot Bob and his missus."

He moved downstairs again to the books.

"Have you got 'The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife'?" he queried.

Anna Henderson looked, but could not find it.

"Never mind!" said Tommy. "Here's one that'll do."

And he ordered "The Green-Eyed Monster" for the cooing doves in Evanston.

"Now," he figured, "there's just Wilma and Edith and Aunt Louise." Once more he started away from the books, but a title caught his eye: "Eat and Grow Thin."

"Great!" exclaimed Tommy. "It'll do for Edith. By

George! It'll do for both of them. 'Eat' for Wilma, and the 'Grow Thin' for Edith. I guess that's doubling up some! And now for Aunt Louise."

The nearest floor-walker told him, in response to his query, that switches would be found on the second floor.

"I ought to have a switch-engine to take me round," said Tommy, who never had felt better in his life. But the floor-walker did not laugh, possibly because he was tired.

"Have you anything to match it with?" asked the lady in the switch-yard.

"No, I haven't."

"Can you give me an idea of the colour?"

"What colours have you got?" demanded Tommy.

"Everything there is. I'll show them all to you, if you've got the time."

"Never mind," said Tommy. "What's your favourite colour in hair?"

The girl laughed.

"Golden," she said.

"You're satisfied, aren't you?" said Tommy, for the girl had chosen the shade of her own shaggy mane. "All right, make it golden. And a merry Christmas to you."

He forgot to ask the price of switches. He added up the rest and found that the total was \$16.25.

"About seventy-five cents for the hair," he guessed. "That will make it seventeen even. I'm some shopper. And all done in an hour and thirteen minutes."

He discovered Billy asleep in the waiting-room, and it took him three precious minutes to bring him to.

"Everybody's fixed but the girl herself," he boasted. "I got books for most of 'em."

"Where have you been?" asked Billy. "What time is it?"

"You've got about thirty-three minutes to get a present for your lady love and grab your train. You'll have to pass up the office."

"What time is it? Where have you been?"

"Don't bother about that. Come on."

On the ride down, Billy begged every one in the elevator to tell him the time, but no one seemed to know. Tommy hurried him out of the store and into a taxi.

"There's a flock of stores round the station," said Tommy. "You can find something there for the dame."

But the progress of the cab through the packed downtown streets was painfully slow, and the station clock, when at last they got in sight of it, registered 5.17.

"You can't wait!" said Tommy. "Give me some money and tell me what to get."

Billy fumbled clumsily in seven pockets before he located the pocket-book. In it were two fives and a ten.

"I gotta have a feevee," he said.

"All right. I'll get something for fifteen. What'll it be?"

"Make it a wrist-watch."

"Sure she has none?"

"She's got one. That's for other wris'."

"I used your last card. Have you got another?"

"Pocket-book," said Billy.

Tommy hastily searched and found a card. He pushed Billy toward the station entrance.

"Good-bye, and merry Christmas," said Tommy.

"Goo'-bye, and God bless you!" said Billy, but he was talking to a large policeman.

"Where are you trying to go?" asked the latter.

"Souise Ben," said Billy.

"Hurry up, then. You've only got a minute."

The minute and six more were spent in the purchase of a ticket. And when Billy reached the gate, the 5.25 had gone and the 5.30 was about to chase it.

"Where to?" inquired the gate-man.

"Souise Ben'," said Billy.

"Run, then," said the gate-man.

Billy ran. He ran to the first open vestibule of the Rock Island train, bound for St. Joe, Missouri.

"Where to?" asked a porter.

"Souise," said Billy.

"Ah can see that," said the porter. "But where you goin'?"

The train began to move, and Billy, one foot dragging on the station platform, moved with it. The porter dexterously pulled him aboard. And he was allowed to ride to Englewood.

Walking down Van Buren Street, it suddenly occurred to the genial Mr. Richards that he would have to go some himself to get his baggage and catch the 6.30 for the north-west. He

thought of it in front of a Van Buren jewellery shop. He stopped, and went in.

Three-quarters of an hour later, a messenger-boy delivered a particularly ugly and frankly inexpensive wrist-watch at the McDonald home. The parcel was addressed to Miss McDonald, and the accompanying card read :

"Mr. Bowen : Call me up any night, after seven. Calume 2678. Miss Violet Moore."

There was no goodwill toward men in the McDonald home this Christmas. Ellen spent the day in bed, and the orders were that she must not be disturbed.

Downstairs, one person smiled. It was Walter. He smiled in spite of the fact that his father had tossed his brand-new five-dollar poker set into the open fireplace. He smiled in spite of the fact that he was not allowed to leave the house, not even to take Kathryn to church.

"Gee!" he thought, between smiles, "Billy sure had nerve!"

Bob walked round among his relatives seeking to dispel the gloom with a remark that he thought apt and nifty :

"Be grateful," was the remark, "that he had one of his screamingly funny moods before it was too late."

But no one but Bob seemed to think much of the remark, and no one seemed grateful.

Those are the facts, and it was quite a job to dig them up. But I did it.

THE POTWELL INN



H. G. WELLS

H. G. WELLS completed his education at the Royal College of Science and soon afterwards began writing the clever and often humorous stories with a scientific background which made his name. Only less famous than his novels are *The Outline of History* and his ingenious prophecy of the future entitled *The Shape of Things to Come*.

THE POTWELL INN

I

WHEN a man has once broken through the paper walls of everyday circumstance, those unsubstantial walls that hold so many of us securely prisoned from the cradle to the grave, he has made a discovery. If the world does not please you, *you can change it*. Determine to alter it at any price, and you can change it altogether. You may change it to something sinister and angry, to something appalling, but it may be you will change it to something brighter, something more agreeable, and at the worst something much more interesting. There is only one sort of man who is absolutely to blame for his own misery, and that is the man who finds life dull and dreary. There are no circumstances in the world that determined action cannot alter, unless, perhaps, they are the walls of a prison cell, and even those will dissolve and change, I am told, into the infirmary compartment, at any rate, for the man who can fast with resolution. I give these things as facts and information, and with no moral intimations. And Mr. Polly, lying awake at nights, with a renewed indigestion, with Miriam sleeping sonorously beside him, and a general air of inevitableness about his situation, saw through it, understood there was no inevitable any more, and escaped his former despair.

He could, for example, "clear out."

It became a wonderful and alluring phrase to him—"Clear out!"

Why had he never thought of clearing out before?

He was amazed and a little shocked at the unimaginative and superfluous criminality in him that had turned old, cramped, and stagnant Fishbourne into a blaze and new beginnings. (I wish from the bottom of my heart I could add that he was properly sorry.) But something constricting

and restrained seemed to have been destroyed by that flare. *Fishbourne wasn't the world.* That was the new, the essential fact of which he had lived so lamentably in ignorance. Fishbourne, as he had known it and hated it, so that he wanted to kill himself to get out of it, *wasn't the world.*

The insurance money he was to receive made everything humane and kindly and practicable. He would "clear out" with justice and humanity. He would take exactly twenty-one pounds, and all the rest he would leave to Miriam. That seemed to him absolutely fair. Without him, she could do all sorts of things—all the sorts of things she was constantly urging him to do. . . .

And he would go off along the white road that led to Garchester, and on to Crogate and so to Tunbridge Wells, where there was a Toad Rock he had heard of but never seen. (It seemed to him this must needs be a marvel.) And so to other towns and cities. He would walk and loiter by the way, and sleep in inns at night, and get an odd job here and there, and talk to strange people.

Perhaps he would get quite a lot of work, and prosper; and if he did not do so he would lie down in front of a train, or wait for a warm night and then fall into some smooth, broad river. Not so bad as sitting down to a dentist—not nearly so bad. And he would never open a shop any more.

So the possibilities of the future presented themselves to Mr. Polly as he lay awake at nights.

It was springtime, and in the woods, so soon as one got out of reach of the sea wind, there would be anemones and primroses.

A month later a leisurely and dusty tramp, plump equatorially and slightly bald, with his hands in his pockets and his lips puckered to a contemplative whistle, strolled along the river bank between Uppingdon and Potwell. It was a profusely budding spring day, and greens such as God had never permitted in the world before in human memory (though, indeed, they come every year and we forget) were mirrored vividly in a mirror of equally unprecedented brown. For a time the wanderer stopped and stood still, and even the thin whistle died away from his lips as he watched a water-vole run to and fro upon a little headland across the stream. The vole plopped into the water, and swam and

dived, and only when the last ring of its disturbance had vanished did Mr. Polly resume his thoughtful course to nowhere in particular.

For the first time in many years he had been leading a healthy human life, living constantly in the open air, walking every day for eight or nine hours, eating sparingly, accepting every conversational opportunity, not even disdaining the discussion of possible work. And beyond mending a hole in his coat, that he had made while negotiating barbed wire, with a borrowed needle and thread in a lodging-house, he had done no real work at all. Neither had he worried about business nor about times and seasons. And for the first time in his life he had seen the Aurora Borealis.

So far, the holiday had cost him very little. He had arranged it on a plan that was entirely his own. He had started with four five-pound notes and a pound divided into silver, and he had gone by train from Fishbourne to Ashington. At Ashington he had gone to the post office, obtained a registered letter envelope, and sent his four five-pound notes with a short, brotherly note addressed to himself at Gilhampton Post Office. He sent this letter to Gilhampton for no other reason in the world than that he liked the name of Gilhampton and the rural suggestion of its containing county, which was Sussex; and having so despatched it, he set himself to discover, mark down, and walk to Gilhampton, and so recover his resources. And having got to Gilhampton at last, he changed a five-pound note, bought four pound postal orders, and repeated his manœuvre with nineteen pounds.

After a lapse of fifteen years he rediscovered this interesting world, about which so many people go incredibly blind and bored. He went along country roads while all the birds were piping and chirruping and cheeping and singing, and looked at fresh new things, and felt as happy and irresponsible as a boy with an unexpected half-holiday. And if ever the thought of Miriam returned to him, he controlled his mind. He came to country inns and sat for unmeasured hours talking of this and that to those sage carters who rest for ever in the taps of country inns, while the big, sleek, brass-jingling horses wait patiently outside with their wagons. He got a job with some van people who were wandering about the country with swings and a steam roundabout,

and remained with them three days, until one of their dogs took a violent dislike to him, and made his duties unpleasant. He talked to tramps and wayside labourers. He snoozed under hedges by day, and in outhouses and hayricks at night, and once, but only once, he slept in a casual ward. He felt as the etiolated grass and daisies must do when you move the garden roller away to a new place.

He gathered a quantity of strange and interesting memories.

He crossed some misty meadows by moonlight and the mist lay low on the grass, so low that it scarcely reached above his waist, and houses and clumps of trees stood out like islands in a milky sea, so sharply defined was the upper surface of the mist-bank. He came nearer and nearer to a strange thing that floated like a boat upon this magic lake, and behold, something moved at the stern, and a rope was whisked at the prow, and it had changed into a pensive cow, drowsy-eyed, regarding him. . . .

He saw a remarkable sunset in a new valley near Maidstone, a very red and clear sunset, a wide redness under a pale, cloudless heaven, and with the hills all round the edge of the sky a deep purple blue and clear and flat, looking exactly as he had seen mountains painted in pictures. He seemed transported to some strange country, and would have felt no surprise if the old labourer he came upon leaning silently over a gate had addressed him in an unfamiliar tongue. . . .

Then one night, just towards dawn, his sleep upon a pile of brushwood was broken by the distant rattle of a racing motor-car breaking all the speed regulations, and as he could not sleep again, he got up and walked into Maidstone as the day came. He had never been abroad in a town at four o'clock in his life before, and the stillness of everything in the bright sunrise impressed him profoundly. At one corner was a startling policeman, standing up in a doorway quite motionless like a waxen image. Mr. Polly wished him 'good morning' unanswered, and went down to the bridge over the Medway, and sat on the parapet, very still and thoughtful, watching the town awaken, and wondering what he should do if it didn't, if the world of men never woke again. . . .

One day he found himself going along a road, with a

wide space of sprouting bracken and occasional trees on either side, and suddenly this road became strangely and perplexingly familiar. "Lord!" he said, and turned about and stood. "It can't be."

He was incredulous, then left the road and walked along a scarcely perceptible track to the left, and came in half a minute to an old lichenous stone wall. It seemed exactly the bit of wall he had known so well. It might have been but yesterday he was in that place; there remained even a little pile of wood. It became absurdly the same wood. The bracken, perhaps, was not so high, and most of its fronds were still coiled up, that was all. Here he had stood, it seemed, and there she had sat and looked down upon him. Where was she now, and what had become of her? He counted the years back, and marvelled that beauty should have called to him with so imperious a voice—and signified nothing.

He hoisted himself with some little difficulty to the top of the wall, and saw far off under the beech trees two school-girls—small, insignificant, pigtailed creatures, with heads of blonde and black, with their arms twined about each other's necks, no doubt telling each other the silliest secrets.

But that girl with the red hair—was she a countess? was she a queen? Children, perhaps? Had sorrow dared to touch her?

Had she forgotten altogether? . . .

A tramp sat by the roadside, thinking, and it seemed to the man in the passing motor-car he must needs be plotting for another pot of beer. But, as a matter of fact, what the tramp was saying to himself over and over again, was a variant upon a well-known Hebrew word.

"Itchabod," the tramp was saying in the voice of one who reasons on the side of the inevitable. "It's Fair Itchabod, O' Man. There's no going back to things like that."

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, one hot day in May, when Mr. Polly, unhurrying and serene, came upon that broad bend of the river to which the little lawn and garden of the Potwell Inn run down. He stopped at the sight of the place and surveyed its deep tiled roof, nestling under big trees—you never get a decently big, decently shaped tree by the seaside—its sign towards the roadway,

its sun-blistered green bench and tables, its shapely white windows and its row of upshooting hollyhock plants in the garden. A hedge separated the premises from a buttercup-yellow meadow, and beyond stood three poplars in a group against the sky, three exceptionally tall, graceful, and harmonious poplars. It is hard to say what there was about them that made them so beautiful to Mr. Polly, but they seemed to him to touch a pleasant scene with a distinction almost divine. He stood admiring them quietly for a long time.

At last the need for coarser æsthetic satisfactions arose in him.

"Provinder," he whispered, drawing near to the inn. "Cold sirloin, for choice. And nutbrown brew and wheaten bread."

The nearer he came to the place the more he liked it. The windows on the ground floor were long and low, and they had pleasing red blinds. The green tables outside were agreeably ringed with memories of former drinks, and an extensive grape-vine spread level branches across the whole front of the place. Against the wall was a broken oar, two boat-hooks, and the stained and faded red cushions of a pleasure-boat. One went up three steps to the glass-panelled door and peeped into a broad, low room with a bar and a beer-engine, behind which were many bright and helpful-looking bottles against mirrors, and great and little pewter measures, and bottles fastened in brass wire upside down, with their corks replaced by taps, and a white china cask labelled "Shrub," and cigar boxes, and boxes of cigarettes, and a couple of Toby jugs and a beautifully coloured hunting scene framed and glazed, showing the most elegant people taking Piper's Cherry Brandy, and cards such as the law requires about the dilution of spirits and the illegality of bringing children into bars, and satirical verses about swearing and asking for credit, and three very bright, red-cheeked wax apples, and a round-shaped clock.

But these were the mere background to the really pleasant thing in the spectacle, which was quite the plumpest woman Mr. Polly had ever seen, seated in an arm-chair in the midst of all these bottles and glasses and glittering things, peacefully and tranquilly, and without the slightest loss of dignity, asleep. Many people would have called her a fat woman,

but Mr. Polly's innate sense of epithet told him from the outset that plump was the word. She had shapely brows and a straight, well-shaped nose, kind lines and contentment about her mouth, and beneath it the jolly chins clustered like chubby little cherubim about the feet of an Assumption-ing Madonna. Her plumpness was firm and pink and wholesome, and her hands, dimpled at every joint, were clasped in front of her; she seemed, as it were, to embrace herself with infinite confidence and kindness, as one who knew herself good in substance, good in essence, and would show her gratitude to God by that ready acceptance of all that He had given her. Her head was a little on one side, not much, but just enough to speak of trustfulness, and rob her of the stiff effect of self-reliance. And she slept.

"My sort," said Mr. Polly, and opened the door very softly, divided between the desire to enter and come nearer, and an instinctive indisposition to break slumbers so manifestly sweet and satisfying.

She awoke with a start, and it amazed Mr. Polly to see swift terror flash into her eyes. Instantly it had gone again.

"Law!" she said, her face softening with relief. "I thought you was Jim."

"I'm never Jim," said Mr. Polly.

"You've got his sort of hat."

"Ah!" said Mr. Polly, and leant over the bar.

"It just came into my head you was Jim," said the plump lady, dismissed the topic and stood up. "I believe I was having forty winks," she said, "if all the truth was told. What can I do for you?"

"Cold meat?" said Mr. Polly.

"There *is* cold meat," the plump woman admitted.

"And room for it."

The plump woman came and leant over the bar and regarded him judicially but kindly. "There's some cold boiled beef," she said, and added, "A bit of crisp lettuce?"

"New mustard," said Mr. Polly.

"And a tankard!"

"A tankard."

They understood each other perfectly.

"Looking for work?" asked the plump woman.

"In a way," said Mr. Polly.

They smiled like old friends.

Whatever the truth may be about love, there is certainly such a thing as friendship at first sight. They liked each other's voices, they liked each other's way of smiling and speaking.

"It's such beautiful weather this spring," said Mr. Polly, explaining everything.

"What sort of work do you want?" she asked.

"I've never properly thought that out," said Mr. Polly. "I've been looking round—for ideas."

"Will you have your beef in the tap or outside? That's the tap."

Mr. Polly had a glimpse of an oaken settle. "In the tap will be handier for you," he said.

"Hear that?" said the plump lady.

"Hear what?"

"Listen."

Presently the silence was broken by a distant howl—"Ooooooover!" "Eh?" she said.

He nodded.

"That's the ferry. And there isn't a ferryman."

"Could I?"

"Can you punt?"

"Never tried."

"Well—pull the pole out before you reach the end of the punt, that's all. Try."

Mr. Polly went out again into the sunshine.

At times one can tell so much so briefly. Here are the facts then—bare. He found a punt and a pole, got across to the steps on the opposite side, picked up an elderly gentleman in an alpaca jacket and a pith helmet, cruised with him vaguely for twenty minutes, conveyed him tortuously into the midst of a thicket of forget-me-not spangled sedges, splashed some waterweed over him, hit him twice with the punt pole, and finally landed him, alarmed but abusive, in treacherous soil at the edge of a hay meadow about forty yards down-stream, where he immediately got into difficulties with a noisy, aggressive little white dog, which was guarding a jacket.

Mr. Polly returned in a complicated manner, but with perfect dignity, to his moorings.

He found the plump woman rather flushed and tearful, and seated at one of the green tables outside.

"I been laughing at you," she said.

"What for?" asked Mr. Polly.

"I ain't 'ad such a laugh since Jim come 'ome. When you 'it 'is 'ead, it 'urt my side."

"It didn't hurt his head—not particularly."

"Did you charge him anything?"

"Gratis," said Mr. Polly. "I never thought of it."

The plump woman pressed her hands to her sides and laughed silently for a space. "You ought to 'ave charged 'im Sumpthing," she said. "You better come and have your cold meat before you do any more puntin'. You and me'll get on together."

Presently she came and stood watching him eat. "You eat better than you punt," she said; and then, "I dessay you could learn to punt."

"Wax to receive and marble to retain," said Mr. Polly. "This beef is a Bit of All Right, Ma'm. I could have done differently if I hadn't been punting on an empty stomach. There's a lear feeling as the pole goes in——"

"I've never held with fasting," said the plump woman.

"You want a ferryman?"

"I want an odd man about the place."

"I'm odd all right. What's the wages?"

"Not much, but you get tips and pickings. I've a sort of feeling it would suit you."

"I've a sort of feeling it would. What's the duties? Fetch and carry? Ferry? Garden? Wash bottles? *Ceteris Paribus*?"

"That's about it," said the fat woman.

"Give me a trial."

"I've more than half a mind. 'Or I wouldn't have said anything about it. I suppose you're all right. You've got a sort of half-respectable look about you. I suppose you 'aven't *done* anything?"

"Bit of Arson," said Mr. Polly, as if he jested.

"So long as you haven't the habit," said the plump woman.

"My first time, M'am," said Mr. Polly, munching his way through an excellent big leaf of lettuce. "And my last."

"It's all right if you haven't been to prison," said the plump woman. "It isn't what a man's happened to do makes

'im bad. We all happen to do things at times. It's bringing it home to him and spoiling his self-respect does the mischief. You don't *look* a wrong 'un. 'Ave you been to prison?"

"Never."

"Nor a Reformatory? Nor any Institution?"

"Not me. Do I *look* reformed?"

"Can you paint and carpenter a bit?"

"Ripe for it."

"Have a bit of cheese?"

"If I might."

And the way she brought the cheese showed Mr. Polly that the business was settled in her mind.

He spent the afternoon exploring the premises of the Potwell Inn and learning the duties that might be expected of him, such as Stockholm tarring fences, digging potatoes, swabbing out boats, helping people land, embarking, landing, and time-keeping for the hirers of two rowing boats and one Canadian canoe, bailing out the said vessels and concealing their leaks and defects from prospective hirers, persuading inexperienced hirers to start down-stream rather than up, repairing rowlocks and taking inventories of returning boats with a view to supplementary charges, cleaning boots, sweeping chimneys, house painting, cleaning windows, sweeping out and sanding the Tap and Bar, cleaning pewter, washing glasses, turpentineing woodwork, whitewashing generally, plumbing and engineering, repairing locks and clocks, waiting and tapster's work generally, beating carpets and mats, cleaning bottles and saving corks, taking into the cellar, moving, tapping, and connecting beer-casks with their engines, blocking and destroying wasps' nests, doing forestry with several trees, drowning superfluous kittens, dog-fancying as required, assisting in the rearing of ducklings and the care of various poultry, bee-keeping, stabling, baiting and grooming horses and asses, cleaning and "garing" motor-cars and bicycles, inflating tyres and repairing punctures, recovering the bodies of drowned persons from the river as required, and assisting people in trouble in the water, first-aid and sympathy, improvising and superintending a bathing station for visitors, attending inquests and funerals in the interests of the establishment, scrubbing floors and all the ordinary duties of a scullion, the Ferry, chasing hens and goats from the adjacent cottages out of the garden, making up paths and

superintending drainage, gardening generally, delivering bottled beer and soda-water siphons in the neighbourhood, running miscellaneous errands, removing drunken and offensive persons from the premises by tact or muscle, as occasion required, keeping in with the local policeman, defending the premises in general and the orchard in particular from nocturnal depredators. . . .

"Can but try it," said Mr. Polly towards tea-time. "When there's nothing else on hand I suppose I might do a bit of fishing."

2

Mr. Polly was particularly charmed by the ducklings.

They were piping about among the vegetables in the company of their foster mother, and as he and the plump woman came down the garden path the little creatures mobbed them, and ran over their boots and in between Mr. Polly's legs, and did their best to be trodden upon and killed after the manner of ducklings all the world over. Mr. Polly had never been near young ducklings before, and their extreme blondness and the delicate completeness of their feet and beaks filled him with admiration. It is open to question whether there is anything more friendly in the world than a very young duckling. It was with the utmost difficulty that he tore himself away to practise punting, with the plump woman coaching from the bank. Punting, he found, was difficult, but not impossible, and towards four o'clock he succeeded in conveying a second passenger across the sundering flood from the inn to the unknown.

As he returned, slowly indeed, but now one might almost say surely, to the peg to which the punt was moored, he became aware of a singularly delightful human being awaiting him on the bank. She stood with her legs very wide apart, her hands behind her back, and her head a little on one side, watching his gestures with an expression of disdainful interest. She had black hair and brown legs and a buff short frock and very intelligent eyes. And when he had reached a sufficient proximity she remarked, "Hallo!"

"Hallo," said Mr. Polly, and saved himself in the nick of time from disaster.

"Silly," said the young lady, and Mr. Polly lunged nearer.

"What are you called?"

"Polly."

"Liar!"

"Why?"

"I'm Polly."

"Then I'm Alfred. But I meant to be Polly."

"I was first."

"All right. I'm going to be the ferryman."

"I see. You'll have to punt better."

"You should have seen me early in the afternoon."

"I can imagine it . . . I've seen the others."

"What others?" Mr. Polly had landed now and was fastening up the punt.

"What Uncle Jim has scooted."

"Scooted?"

"He comes and scoots them. He'll scoot you, too, I expect."

A mysterious shadow seemed to fall athwart the sunshine and pleasantness of the Potwell Inn.

"I'm not a scooter," said Mr. Polly.

"Uncle Jim is."

She whistled a little flatly for a moment, and threw small stones at a clump of meadowsweet that sprang from the bank. Then she remarked:

"When Uncle Jim comes back he'll cut your insides out. . . . P'r'aps, very likely, he'll let me see."

There was a pause.

"*Who's* Uncle Jim?" Mr. Polly asked in a faded voice.

"Don't know who Uncle Jim is! He'll show you. He's a scorcher, is Uncle Jim. He only came back just a little time ago, and he's scooted three men. He don't like strangers about, don't Uncle Jim. He *can* swear. He's going to teach me, soon as I can whistle properly."

"Teach you to swear!" cried Mr. Polly, horrified.

"*And spit,*" said the little girl proudly. "He says I'm the gamest little beast he ever came across—ever."

For the first time in his life it seemed to Mr. Polly that he had come across something sheerly dreadful. He stared at the pretty thing of flesh and spirit in front of him, lightly balanced on its stout little legs and looking at him with eyes that had still to learn the expression of either disgust or fear.

"I say," said Mr. Polly. "How old are you?"

"Nine," said the little girl.

She turned away and reflected. Truth compelled her to add one other statement.

"He's not what I should call handsome, not Uncle Jim," she said. "But he's a Scorcher and no Mistake. . . . Gramma don't like him."

3

Mr. Polly found the plump woman in the big bricked kitchen lighting a fire for tea. He went to the root of the matter at once.

"I say," he asked, "who's Uncle Jim?"

The plump woman blanched and stood still for a moment. A stick fell out of the bundle in her hand unheeded. "That little granddaughter of mine been saying things?" she asked faintly.

"Bits of things," said Mr. Polly.

"Well, I suppose I must tell you sooner or later. He's —It's Jim. He's the Drorback to this place, that's what he is. The Drorback. I hoped you mightn't hear so soon. . . . Very likely he's gone."

"*She* don't seem to think so."

"'E 'asn't been near the place these two weeks and more," said the plump woman.

"But who is he?"

"I suppose I got to tell you," said the plump woman.

"She says he scoots people," Mr. Polly remarked after a pause.

"He's my own sister's son." The plump woman watched the crackling fire for a space. "I suppose I got to tell you," she repeated.

She softened towards tears. "I try not to think of it, and night and day he's haunting me. I try not to think of it. I've been for easy-going all my life. But I'm that worried and afraid, with death and ruin threatened and evil all about me! I don't know what to do! My own sister's son, and me a widow woman and 'elpless against his doin's!"

She put down the sticks she held upon the fender, and felt for her handkerchief. She began to sob and talk quickly.

"I wouldn't mind nothing else half so much if he'd leave

that child alone. But he goes talking to her—if I leave her a moment he's talking to her, teaching her Words, and giving her ideas!"

"That's a Bit Thick," said Mr. Polly.

"Thick!" cried the plump woman; "it's 'orrible! And what am I to do? He's been here three times now, six days, and a week, and a part of a week, and I pray to God night and day he may never come again. Praying! Back he's come, sure as fate. He takes my money and he takes my things. He won't let no man stay here to protect me or do the boats or work the ferry. The ferry's getting a scandal. They stand and shout and scream and use language. . . . If I complain they'll say I'm helpless to manage here, they'll take away my licence, out I shall go—and it's all the living I can get—and he knows it, and he plays on it, and he don't care. And here I am. I'd send the child away, but I got nowhere to send the child. I buys him off when it comes to that, and back he comes, worse than ever, prowling round and doing evil. And not a soul to help me. Not a soul! I just hoped there might be a day or so. Before he comes back again. I was just hoping—I'm the sort that hopes."

Mr. Polly was reflecting on the flaws and drawbacks that seem to be inseparable from all the more agreeable things of life.

"Biggish sort of man, I expect?" asked Mr. Polly, trying to get the situation in all its bearings.

But the plump woman did not heed him. She was going on with her fire-making, and retailing in disconnected fragments the fearfulness of Uncle Jim.

"There was always something a bit wrong with him," she said; "but nothing you mightn't have hoped for, not till they took him, and carried him off, and reformed him. . . .

"He was cruel to the hens and chickings, it's true, and stuck a knife into another boy; but then I've seen him that nice to a cat, nobody could have been kinder. I'm sure he didn't do no 'arm to that cat whatever any one tries to make out of it. I'd never listen to that. . . . It was that Reformatory ruined him. They put him along of a lot of London boys full of ideas and wickedness, and because he didn't mind pain—and he don't, I *will* admit, try as I would—they made him think himself a hero. Them boys laughed at the teachers they set over them, laughed and mocked at them—and I

don't suppose they *was* the best teachers in the world; I don't suppose, and I don't suppose any one sensible does suppose that every one who goes to be a teacher or a chaplain or a warder in a Reformatory Home goes and changes right away into an Angel of Grace from Heaven—and, oh Lord! Where was I?"

"What did they send him to the Reformatory for?"

"Playing truant and stealing. He stole right enough—stole the money from an old woman, and what was I to do when it came to the trial, but say what I knew. And him like a viper a-looking at me—more like a viper than a human boy. He leans on the bar and looks at me. 'All right, Aunt Flo,' he says; just that, and nothing more. Time after time I've dreamt of it, and now he's come. 'They've Reformed me,' he says, 'and made me a devil, and devil I mean to be to you. So out with it,' he says."

"What did you give him last time?" asked Mr. Polly.

"Three golden pounds," said the plump woman. "'That won't last very long,' he says. 'But there ain't no hurry. I'll be back in a week about.' If I wasn't one of the hoping sort——"

She left the sentence unfinished.

Mr. Polly reflected. "What sort of a size is he?" he asked. "I'm not one of your Herculeaceous sort, if you mean that. Nothing very wonderful bicepally."

"You'll scoot," said the plump woman, with conviction rather than bitterness. "You'd better scoot now, and I'll try and find some money for him to go away again when he comes. It ain't reasonable to expect you to do anything but scoot. But I suppose it's the way of a woman in trouble to try and get help from a man, and hope and hope."

"How long's he been about?" asked Mr. Polly, ignoring his own outlook.

"Three months it is come the seventh since he come in by that very back door—and I hadn't set eyes on him for seven long years. He stood in the door watchin' me, and suddenly he let off a yelp—like a dog, and there he was grinning at the fright he'd given me. 'Good old Aunt Flo,' he says, 'ain't you dee-lighted to see me,' he says, 'now I'm Reformed'?"

The plump lady went to the sink and filled the kettle.

"I never did like 'im," she said, standing at the sink.

"And seeing him there, with his teeth all black and broken—P'r'aps I didn't give him much of a welcome at first. Not but what I would have been kind to him. 'Lord!' I said, 'it's Jim.'"

"'It's Jim,' he said. 'Like a bad shillin'—like a damned bad shilling. Jim and trouble. You all of you wanted me Reformed, and now you got me Reformed. I'm a Reformatory Reformed Character, warranted all right, and turned out as such. Ain't you going to ask me in, Auntie dear?'"

"'Come in,' I said. 'I won't have it said I wasn't ready to be kind to you!'"

"He comes in and shuts the door. Down he sits in that chair. 'I come to torment you,' he says, 'you old Sump-thing!' and begins at me. . . . No 'uman being could ever have been called such things before. It made me cry out. 'And now,' he says, 'just to show I ain't afraid of 'urting you,' he says, and ups and twists my wrist."

Mr. Polly gasped.

"I could stand even his vi'lence," said the plump woman, "if it wasn't for the child."

Mr. Polly went to the kitchen window and surveyed his namesake, who was away up the garden path, with her hands behind her back, and wisps of black hair in disorder about her little face, thinking, thinking profoundly, about ducklings.

"You two oughtn't to be left," he said.

The plump woman stared at his back with hard hope in her eyes.

"I don't see that it's *my* affair," said Mr. Polly.

The plump woman resumed her business with the kettle.

"I'd like to have a look at him before I go," said Mr. Polly, thinking aloud, and added, "somehow. Not my business, of course."

"Lord!" he cried, with a start, at a noise in the bar, "who's that?"

"Only a customer," said the plump woman.

4

Mr. Polly made no rash promises, and thought a great deal.

"It seems a good sort of Crib," he said, and added, "for a chap who's looking for Trouble."

But he stayed on, and did various things out of the list I have already given, and worked the ferry, and it was four days before he saw anything of Uncle Jim. And so resistant is the human mind to things not yet experienced, that he could easily have believed in that time that there was no such person in the world as Uncle Jim. The plump woman, after her one outbreak of confidences, ignored the subject, and little Polly seemed to have exhausted her impressions in her first communication, and engaged her mind now, with a simple directness, in the study and subjugation of the new human being Heaven had sent into her world. The first unfavourable impression of his punting was soon effaced; he could nickname ducklings very amusingly, create boats out of wooden splinters, and stalk and fly from imaginary tigers in the orchard, with a convincing earnestness that was surely beyond the power of any other human being. She conceded at last that he should be called Mr. Polly, in honour of her, Miss Polly, even as he desired.

Uncle Jim turned up in the twilight.

Uncle Jim appeared with none of the disruptive violence Mr. Polly had dreaded. He came quite softly. Mr. Polly was going down the lane behind the church, that led to the Potwell Inn, after posting a letter to the lime-juice people at the post office. He was walking slowly, after his habit, and thinking discursively. With a sudden tightening of the muscles he became aware of a figure walking noiselessly beside him.

His first impression was of a face singularly broad above, and with a wide, empty grin as its chief feature below, of a slouching body and dragging feet.

"'Arf a mo'," said the figure, as if in response to his start, and speaking in a hoarse whisper. "'Arf a mo', mister. You the noo bloke at the Potwell Inn?"

Mr. Polly felt evasive. "S'pose I am," he replied hoarsely, and quickened his pace.

"'Arf a mo'," said Uncle Jim, taking his arm. "We ain't doing a (sanguinary) Marathon. It ain't a (decorated) cinder track. I want a word with you, mister. See?"

Mr. Polly wriggled his arm free and stopped. "What is it?" he asked, and faced the terror.

"I jest want a (decorated) word wiv you. See?—just a friendly word or two. Just to clear up any blooming errors.

That's all I want. No need to be so (richly decorated) proud, if you *are* the noo bloke at Potwell Inn. Not a bit of it. See ?"

Uncle Jim was certainly not a handsome person. He was short, shorter than Mr. Polly, with long arms and lean, big hands ; a thin and wiry neck stuck out of his grey flannel shirt, and supported a big head that had something of the snake in the convergent lines of its broad, knobby brow, meanly proportioned face, and pointed chin. His almost toothless mouth seemed a cavern in the twilight. Some accident had left him with one small and active, and one large and expressionless reddish eye, and wisps of straight hair strayed from under the blue cricket cap he pulled down obliquely over the latter. He spat between his teeth, and wiped his mouth untidily with the soft side of his fist.

"You got to blurry well shift," he said. "See ?"

"Shift !" said Mr. Polly. "How ?"

"'Cos the Potwell Inn's *my* beat. See ?"

Mr. Polly had never felt less witty. "How's it your beat ?" he asked.

Uncle Jim thrust his face forward and shook his open hand, bent like a claw, under Mr. Polly's nose. "Not your blooming business," he said. "You got to shift."

"S'pose I don't," said Mr. Polly.

"You got to shift."

The tone of Uncle Jim's voice became urgent and confidential.

"You don't know who you're up against," he said. "It's a kindness I'm doing to warn you. See ? I'm just one of those blokes who don't stick at things, see ? I don't stick at nuffin."

Mr. Polly's manner became detached and confidential—as though the matter and the speaker interested him greatly, but didn't concern him over much. "What do you think you'll do ?" he asked.

"If you don't clear out ?"

"Yes."

"*Gaw* !" said Uncle Jim. "You'd better ! 'Ere !"

He gripped Mr. Polly's wrist with a grip of steel, and in an instant Mr. Polly understood the relative quality of their muscles. He breathed, an uninspiring breath, into Mr. Polly's face.

"What *won't* I do," he said, "once I start in on you?"

He paused, and the night about them seemed to be listening. "I'll make a mess of you," he said, in his hoarse whisper. "I'll do you—injuries. I'll 'urt you. I'll kick you ugly, see? I'll 'urt you in 'orrible ways—'orrible ugly ways. . . ."

He scrutinised Mr. Polly's face.

"You'll cry," he said, "to see yourself. See? Cry, you will."

"You got no right," began Mr. Polly.

"Right!" His note was fierce. "Ain't the old woman me aunt?"

He spoke still closelier. "I'll make a gory mess of you. I'll cut bits orf you——"

He receded a little. "I got no quarrel with *you*," he said.

"It's too late to go to-night," said Mr. Polly.

"I'll be round to-morrer—'bout eleven. See? And if I finds you——"

He produced a blood-curdling oath.

"H'm," said Mr. Polly, trying to keep things light. "We'll consider your suggestions."

"You better," said Uncle Jim, and suddenly, noiselessly, was going.

His whispering voice sank until Mr. Polly could hear only the dim fragments of sentences. "'Orrible things to you—'Orrible things. . . . Kick yer Ugly. . . . Cut yer—liver out . . . spread it all about, I will. . . . See? I don't care a dead rat one way or the uvver."

And with a curious twisting gesture of the arm, Uncle Jim receded until his face was a still, dim thing that watched, and the black shadows of the hedge seemed to have swallowed up his body altogether.

5

Next morning about half-past ten Mr. Polly found himself seated under a clump of fir-trees by the roadside, and about three miles and a half from the Potwell Inn. He was by no means sure whether he was taking a walk to clear his mind, or leaving that threat-marred Paradise for good and all.

His reason pointed a lean, unhesitating finger along the latter course.

For, after all, the thing was not *his* quarrel.

That agreeable, plump woman—agreeable, motherly, comfortable as she might be—wasn't his affair; that child with the mop of black hair, who combined so magically the charm of mouse and butterfly and flitting bird, who was daintier than a flower and softer than a peach, was no concern of his. Good Heavens! What were they to him? Nothing! . . .

Uncle Jim, of course, *had* a claim, a sort of claim.

If it came to duty and chucking up this attractive, indolent, observant, humorous, tramping life, there were those who had a right to him, a legitimate right, a prior claim on his protection and chivalry.

Why not listen to the call of duty and go back to Miriam now? . . .

He had had a very agreeable holiday. . . .

And while Mr. Polly sat thinking these things as well as he could, he knew that if only he dared to look up, the Heavens had opened, and the clear judgment on his case was written across the sky.

He knew—he knew now as much as a man can know of life. He knew he had to fight or perish.

Life had never been so clear to him before. It had always been a confused, entertaining spectacle. He had responded to this impulse and that, seeking agreeable and entertaining things, evading difficult and painful things. Such is the way of those who grow up to a life that has neither danger nor honour in its texture. He had been muddled and wrapped about and entangled, like a creature born in the jungle who has never seen sea or sky. Now he had come out of it suddenly into a great exposed place. It was as if God and Heaven waited over him, and all the earth was expectation.

"Not my business," said Mr. Polly, speaking aloud. "Where the devil do I come in?"

And again, with something between a whine and a snarl in his voice, "Not my blasted business!"

His mind seemed to have divided itself into several compartments, each with its own particular discussion busily in progress, and quite regardless of the others. One was busy with the detailed interpretation of the phrase, "Kick

you ugly." There's a sort of French wrestling in which you use and guard against feet. Watch the man's eyes, and as his foot comes up, grip, and over he goes—at your mercy, if you use the advantage rightly. But how do you use the advantage rightly?

When he thought of Uncle Jim the inside feeling of his body faded away rapidly to a blank discomfort. . . .

"Old cadger! She hadn't no business to drag me into her quarrels. Ought to go to the police and ask for help! Dragging me into a quarrel that don't concern me.

"Wish I'd never set eyes on the rotten inn!"

The reality of the case arched over him like the vault of the sky, as plain as the sweet blue heaven above and the wide spread of hill and valley about him. Man comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty, to serve it, to win and increase it, to fight for it, to face anything and dare anything for it, counting death as nothing so long as the dying eyes still turn to it. And fear and dullness and indolence and appetite, which, indeed, are no more than fear's three crippled brothers, who make ambushes and creep by night, are against him, to delay him, to hold him off, to hamper and beguile and kill him in that quest. He had but to lift his eyes to see all that, as much a part of his world as the driving clouds and the bending grass; but he kept himself downcast, a grumbling, inglorious, dirty, fattish little tramp, full of dreams and quivering excuses.

"Why the hell was I ever born?" he said, with the truth almost winning him.

What do you do when a dirty man, who smells, gets you down and under, in the dirt and dust, with a knee below your diaphragm, and a large hairy hand squeezing your windpipe tighter and tighter in a quarrel that isn't, properly speaking, yours?

"If I had a chance against him—" protested Mr. Polly.

"It's no Good, you see," said Mr. Polly.

He stood up as though his decision was made, and was for an instant struck still by doubt.

There lay the road before him, going this way to the east, and that to the west.

Westward, one hour away now, was the Potwell Inn. Already things might be happening there. . . .

Eastward was the wise man's course, a road dipping

between hedges to a hop garden and a wood, and presently, no doubt, reaching an inn, a picturesque church, perhaps, a village, and fresh company. The wise man's course. Mr. Polly saw himself going along it, and tried to see himself going along it with all the self-applause a wise man feels. But somehow it wouldn't come like that. The wise man fell short of happiness for all his wisdom. The wise man had a paunch, and round shoulders, and red ears, and excuses. It was a pleasant road, and why the wise man should not go along it merry and singing, full of summer happiness, was a miracle to Mr. Polly's mind. But, confound it! the fact remained: the figure went slinking—slinking was the only word for it—and would not go otherwise than slinking. He turned his eyes westward as if for an explanation, and if the figure was no longer ignoble, the prospect was appalling.

"One kick in the stummick would settle a chap like me," said Mr. Polly.

"Oh, God!" cried Mr. Polly, and lifted his eyes to heaven, and said for the last time in that struggle, "It isn't my affair!"

And so saying, he turned his face towards the Potwell Inn.

He went back, neither halting nor hastening in his pace after this last decision, but with a mind feverishly busy.

"If I get killed I get killed, and if he gets killed I get hung. Don't seem just somehow."

"Don't suppose I shall *frighten* him off."

6

The private war between Mr. Polly and Uncle Jim for the possession of the Potwell Inn fell naturally into three chief campaigns. There was, first of all, the great campaign which ended in the triumphant eviction of Uncle Jim from the Inn premises; there came next, after a brief interval, the futile invasions of the premises by Uncle Jim that culminated in the Battle of the Dead Eel; and, after some months of involuntary truce, there was the last supreme conflict of the Night Surprise. Each of these campaigns merits a section to itself.

Mr. Polly re-entered the inn discreetly.

He found the plump woman seated in her bar, her eyes

astare, her face white and wet with tears. "O God!" she was saying over and over again—"O God!" The air was full of a spirituous reek, and on the sanded boards in front of the bar were the fragments of a broken bottle, and an overturned glass.

She turned her despair at the sound of his entry, and despair gave place to astonishment.

"You come back!" she said.

"R-ather," said Mr. Polly.

"He's—he's mad drunk and looking for her."

"Where is she?"

"Locked upstairs."

"Haven't you sent to the police?"

"No one to send."

"I'll see to it," said Mr. Polly. "Out this way?"

She nodded.

He went to the crinkly paned window and peered out. Uncle Jim was coming down the garden path towards the house, his hands in his pockets, and singing hoarsely. Mr. Polly remembered afterwards, with pride and amazement, that he felt neither faint nor rigid. He glanced round him, seized a bottle of beer by the neck as an improvised club, and went out by the garden door. Uncle Jim stopped, amazed. His brain did not instantly rise to the new posture of things. "You!" he cried, and stopped for a moment. "You—*scoot!*"

"*Your* job," said Mr. Polly, and advanced some paces.

Uncle Jim stood swaying with wrathful astonishment, and then darted forward with clutching hands. Mr. Polly felt that if his antagonist closed, he was lost, and smote with all his force at the ugly head before him. Smash went the bottle, and Uncle Jim staggered, half stunned by the blow, and blinded with beer.

The lapses and leaps of the human mind are for ever mysterious. Mr. Polly had never expected that bottle to break. In an instant he felt disarmed and helpless. Before him was Uncle Jim, infuriated and evidently still coming on, and for defence was nothing but the neck of a bottle.

For a time our Mr. Polly has figured heroic. Now comes the fall again; he sounded abject terror; he dropped that ineffectual scrap of glass and turned and fled round the corner of the house.

"Bolls !" came the thick voice of the enemy behind him, as one who accepts a challenge, and bleeding but indomitable, Uncle Jim entered the house.

"Bolls !" he said, surveying the bar. "Fightin' with bolls ! I'll show 'im fightin' with bolls !"

Uncle Jim had learnt all about fighting with bottles in the Reformatory Home. Regardless of his terror-stricken aunt, he ranged among the bottled beer and succeeded, after one or two failures, in preparing two bottles to his satisfaction by knocking off the bottom, and gripping them dagger-wise by the necks. So prepared, he went forth again to destroy Mr. Polly.

Mr. Polly, freed from the sense of urgent pursuit, had halted beyond the raspberry canes, and rallied his courage. The sense of Uncle Jim victorious in the house restored his manhood. He went round by the outhouses to the riverside, seeking a weapon, and found an old paddle boat-hook. With this he smote Uncle Jim as he emerged by the door of the tap, Uncle Jim, blaspheming dreadfully, and with dire stabbing intimations in either hand, came through the splintering paddle like a circus rider through a paper hoop, and once more Mr. Polly dropped his weapon and fled.

A careless observer, watching him sprint round and round the inn in front of the lumbering and reproachful pursuit of Uncle Jim, might have formed an altogether erroneous estimate of the issue of the campaign. Certain compensating qualities of the very greatest military value were appearing in Mr. Polly, even as he ran ; if Uncle Jim had strength and brute courage, and the rich toughening experience a Reformatory Home affords, Mr. Polly was nevertheless sober, more mobile, and with a mind now stimulated to an almost incredible nimbleness. So that he not only gained on Uncle Jim, but thought what use he might make of this advantage. The word "strategious" flamed red across the tumult of his mind. As he came round the house for the third time, he darted suddenly into the yard, swung the door to behind himself, and bolted it, seized the zinc pig's pail that stood by the entrance to the kitchen, and had it neatly and resonantly over Uncle Jim's head, as he came belatedly in round the outhouse on the other side. One of the splintered bottles jabbed Mr. Polly's ear—at the time it seemed of no importance—and then Uncle Jim was

down and writhing dangerously and noisily upon the yard tiles, with his head still in the pig pail, and his bottle gone to splinters, and Mr. Polly was fastening the kitchen door against him.

"Can't go on like this for ever," said Mr. Polly, whooping for breath, and selecting a weapon from among the brooms that stood behind the kitchen door.

Uncle Jim was losing his head. He was up and kicking the door, and bellowing unamiable proposals and invitations, so that a strategist emerging silently by the tap door could locate him without difficulty, steal upon him unawares, and——!

But before that felling blow could be delivered, Uncle Jim's ear had caught a footfall, and he turned. Mr. Polly quailed, and lowered his broom—a fatal hesitation.

"Now I got you!" cried Uncle Jim, dancing forward in a disconcerting zigzag.

He rushed too close, and Mr. Polly stopped him featly, as it were a miracle, with the head of the broom across his chest. Uncle Jim seized the broom with both hands. "Lea go," he said, and tugged. Mr. Polly shook his head, tugged, and showed pale, compressed lips. Both tugged. Then Uncle Jim tried to get round the end of the broom; Mr. Polly circled away. They began to circle about one another, both lugging hard, both intensely watchful of the slightest initiative on the part of the other. Mr. Polly wished brooms were longer—twelve or thirteen feet, for example; Uncle Jim was clearly for shortness in brooms. He wasted breath in saying what was to happen shortly—sanguinary, oriental, soul-blanching things—when the broom no longer separated them. Mr. Polly thought he had never seen an uglier person. Suddenly Uncle Jim flashed into violent activity, but alcohol slows movement, and Mr. Polly was equal to him. Then Uncle Jim tried jerks, and, for a terrible instant, seemed to have the room out of Mr. Polly's hands. But Mr. Polly recovered it with the clutch of a drowning man. Then Uncle Jim drove suddenly at Mr. Polly's midriff; but again Mr. Polly was ready, and swept him round in a circle. Then suddenly a wild hope filled Mr. Polly. He saw the river was very near, the post to which the punt was tied not three yards away. With a wild yell he sent the broom home under his antagonist's ribs. "Woosh!" he cried, as the resistance gave.

"Oh! *Gaw!*" said Uncle Jim, going backward helplessly, and Mr. Polly thrust hard, and abandoned the broom to the enemy's despairing clutch.

Splash! Uncle Jim was in the water, and Mr. Polly had leapt like a cat aboard the ferry punt, and grasped the pole.

Up came Uncle Jim spluttering and dripping. "You (unprofitable matter, and printing it might lead to a Censorship of Novels)—You know I got a weak chess!"

The pole took him in the throat and drove him backward and downwards.

"Lea go!" cried Uncle Jim, staggering, and with real terror in his once awful eyes.

Splash! Down he fell backwards into a frothing mass of water, with Mr. Polly jabbing at him. Under water he turned round, and came up again, as if in flight towards the middle of the river. Directly his head appeared, Mr. Polly had him between his shoulders and under again, bubbling thickly. A hand clutched and disappeared.

It was stupendous! Mr. Polly had discovered the heel of Achilles. Uncle Jim had no stomach for cold water. The broom floated away, pitching gently on the swell. Mr. Polly, infuriated by victory, thrust Uncle Jim under again, and drove the punt round on its chain, in such a manner, that when Uncle Jim came up for the fourth time—and now he was nearly out of his depth, too buoyed up to walk, and apparently nearly helpless—Mr. Polly, fortunately for them both, could not reach him.

Uncle Jim made the clumsy gestures of those who struggle insecurely in the water. "Keep out," said Mr. Polly. Uncle Jim, with a great effort, got a footing, emerged until his arm-pits were out of water, until his waistcoat buttons showed, one by one, till scarcely two remained, and made for the camp-sheeting.

"Keep out!" cried Mr. Polly, and leapt off the punt and followed the movements of his victim along the shore.

"I tell you I got a weak chess," said Uncle Jim moistly. "I ate worter. This ain't fair fightin'."

"Keep out!" said Mr. Polly.

"This ain't fair fightin'," said Uncle Jim, almost weeping, and all his terrors had gone.

"Keep out!" said Mr. Polly, with an accurately poised pole.

"I tell you I got to land, you Fool," said Uncle Jim, with a sort of despairing wrathfulness, and began moving down-stream.

"You keep out," said Mr. Polly in parallel movement. "Don't you ever land on this place again! . . ."

Slowly, argumentatively, and reluctantly, Uncle Jim waded down-stream. He tried threats, he tried persuasion, he even tried a belated note of pathos; Mr. Polly remained inexorable, if in secret a little perplexed as to the outcome of the situation. "This cold's getting to my marrer!" said Uncle Jim.

"You want cooling. You keep out in it," said Mr. Polly.

They came round the bend into sight of Nicholson's ait, where the backwater runs down to the Potwell Mill. And there, after much parley and several feints, Uncle Jim made a desperate effort, and struggled into clutch of the overhanging osiers on the island, and so got out of the water, with the mill-stream between them. He emerged dripping and muddy and vindictive. "By *Gaw*!" he said. "I'll skin you for this!"

"You keep off, or I'll do worse to you," said Mr. Polly.

The spirit was out of Uncle Jim for the time, and he turned away to struggle through the osiers towards the mill, leaving a shining trail of water among the green-grey stems.

Mr. Polly returned slowly and thoughtfully to the inn, and suddenly his mind began to bubble with phrases. The plump woman stood at the top of the steps that led up to the inn door, to greet him.

"Law!" she cried, as he drew near, "'asn't 'e killed you?"

"Do I look it?" said Mr. Polly.

"But where's Jim?"

"Gone off."

"'E was mad drunk and dangerous!"

"I put him in the river," said Mr. Polly. "That toned down his alcolaceous frenzy! I gave him a bit of a doing altogether."

"Hain't he 'urt you?"

"Not a bit of it!"

"Then what's all that blood beside your ear?"

Mr. Polly felt. "Quite a cut! Funny how one over-looks things! Heated moments! He must have done

that when he jabbed about with those bottles. Hallo, Kiddy! You venturing downstairs again?"

"Ain't he killed you?" asked the little girl.

"Well!"

"I wish I'd seen more of the fighting."

"Didn't you?"

"All I saw was you running round the house, and Uncle Jim after you."

There was a little pause. "I was leading him on," said Mr. Polly.

"Some one's shouting at the ferry," she said.

"Right-o. But you won't see any more of Uncle Jim for a bit. We've been having a conversazione about that."

"I believe it *is* Uncle Jim," said the little girl.

"Then he can wait," said Mr. Polly shortly.

He turned round and listened for the words that drifted across from the little figure on the opposite bank. So far as he could judge, Uncle Jim was making an appointment for the morrow. Mr. Polly replied with a defiant movement of the punt pole. The little figure was convulsed for a moment, and then went on its way upstream—fiercely.

So it was the first campaign ended in an insecure victory.

7

The next day was Wednesday, and a slack day for the Potwell Inn. It was a hot, close day, full of the murmuring of bees. One or two people crossed by the ferry; an elaborately-equipped fisherman stopped for cold meat and dry ginger ale in the bar parlour; some haymakers came and drank beer for an hour, and afterwards sent jars and jugs by a boy to be replenished; that was all. Mr. Polly had risen early, and was busy about the place meditating upon the probable tactics of Uncle Jim. He was no longer strung up to the desperate pitch of the first encounter. He was grave and anxious. Uncle Jim had shrunk, as all antagonists that are boldly faced shrink, after the first battle, to the negotiable, the vulnerable. Formidable he was, no doubt, but not invincible. He had, under Providence, been defeated once, and he might be defeated altogether.

Mr. Polly went about the place considering the militant possibilities of pacific things—pokers, copper-sticks, garden implements, kitchen knives, garden nets, barbed wire, oars, clothes'-lines, blankets, pewter pots, stockings, and broken bottles. He prepared a club with a stocking and a bottle inside, upon the best East End model. He swung it round his head once, broke an outhouse window with a flying fragment of glass, and ruined the stocking beyond all darning. He developed a subtle scheme, with the cellar flap as a sort of pitfall; but he rejected it finally because (*a*) it might entrap the plump woman, and (*b*) he had no use whatever for Uncle Jim in the cellar. He determined to wire the garden that evening, burglar fashion, against the possibilities of a night attack.

Towards two o'clock in the afternoon three young men arrived in a capacious boat from the direction of Lammam, and asked permission to camp in the paddock. It was given all the more readily by Mr. Polly because he perceived in their proximity a possible check upon the self-expression of Uncle Jim. But he did not foresee, and no one could have foreseen, that Uncle Jim, stealing craftily upon the Potwell Inn in the late afternoon, armed with a large rough-hewn stake, would have mistaken the bending form of one of those campers—who was pulling a few onions by permission in the garden—for Mr. Polly's, and crept upon it swiftly and silently, and smitten its wide invitation unforgettably and unforgivably. It was an error impossible to explain; the resounding whack went up to heaven, the cry of amazement, and Mr. Polly emerged from the inn, armed with the frying-pan he was cleaning, to take this reckless assailant in the rear. Uncle Jim, realizing his error, fled blaspheming into the arms of the other two campers, who were returning from the village with butcher's meat and groceries. They caught him, they smacked his face with steak and punched him with a bursting parcel of lump sugar, they held him, though he bit them, and their idea of punishment was to duck him. They were hilarious, strong young stockbrokers' clerks, Territorials, and seasoned boating men; they ducked him as though it was romping and all that Mr. Polly had to do was to pick up lumps of sugar for them and wipe them on his sleeve and put them on a plate, and explain that Uncle Jim was a notorious bad character, and not quite right in his head.

"Got a regular Obsession the Missis is his aunt," said Mr. Polly, expanding it. "Perfect noosance he is."

But he caught a glance of Uncle Jim's eye as he receded before the campers' urgency that boded ill for him, and in the night he had a disagreeable idea that perhaps his luck might not hold for the third occasion.

That came soon enough. So soon, indeed, as the campers had gone.

Thursday was the early closing day at Lammam, and, next to Sunday, the busiest part of the week at the Potwell Inn. Sometimes as many as six boats all at once would be moored against the ferry punt, and hiring row-boats. People could either have a complete tea, a complete tea with jam, cake, and eggs, a kettle of boiling water and find the rest, or Refreshments *à la carte* as they chose. They sat about, but usually the boiling water-ers had a delicacy about using the tables, and grouped themselves humbly on the ground. The complete tea-ers with jam and eggs got the best tablecloth, on the table nearest the steps that led up to the glass-panelled door.

The groups about the lawn were very satisfying to Mr. Polly's sense of amenity. To the right were the complete tea-ers, with everything heart could desire; then a small group of three young men in remarkable green and violet and pale blue shirts, and two girls in mauve and yellow blouses, with common teas and gooseberry jam, at the green clothless table; then, on the grass down by the pollard willow, a small family of hot-water-ers with a hamper, a little troubled by wasps in their jam from the nest in the tree, and all in mourning, but happy otherwise; and on the lawn to the right a ginger beer lot of 'prentices without their collars, and very jocular and happy. The young people in the rainbow shirts and blouses formed the centre of interest; they were under the leadership of a gold-spectacled senior with a fluting voice and an air of mystery; he ordered everything, and showed a peculiar knowledge of the qualities of the Potwell jams, preferring gooseberry with much insistence. Mr. Polly watched him, christened him the "benifluous influence," glanced at the 'prentices, and went inside and down into the cellar in order to replenish the stock of stone ginger beer, which the plump woman had allowed to run low during the preoccupations of the campaign. It was in the

cellar that he first became aware of the return of Uncle Jim. He became aware of him as a voice, a voice not only hoarse but thick, as voices thicken under the influence of alcohol.

"Where's that muddy-faced mongrel?" cried Uncle Jim. "Let 'im come out to me! Where's that blighted wisp with the punt pole—I got a word to say to 'im. Come out of it, you pot-bellied chunk of dirtiness, you! Come out and 'ave your ugly face wiped. I got a Thing for you . . . 'Ear me?"

"'E's 'iding, that's what 'e's doing," said the voice of Uncle Jim, dropping for a moment to sorrow, and then with a great increment of wrathfulness: "Come out of my nest, you blinking cuckoo, you, or I'll cut your silly insides out! Come out of it, you pockmarked Rat! Stealing another man's 'ome away from 'im! Come out and look me in the face, you squinting son of a Skunk! . . ."

Mr. Polly took the ginger beer and went thoughtfully upstairs to the bar.

"'E's back," said the plump woman as he appeared. "I knew 'e'd come back."

"I heard him," said Mr. Polly, and looked about. "Just gimme the old poker handle that's under the beer-engine."

The door opened softly, and Mr. Polly turned quickly. But it was only the pointed nose and intelligent face of the young man with the gilt spectacles and the discreet manner. He coughed, and the spectacles fixed Mr. Polly.

"I say," he said with quiet earnestness, "there's a chap out here seems to *want* some one."

"Why don't he come in?" said Mr. Polly.

"He seems to want you out there."

"What's he want?"

"I *think*," said the spectacled young man, after a thoughtful moment, "he appears to have brought you a present of fish."

"Isn't he shouting?"

"He *is* a little boisterous."

"He'd better come in."

The manner of the spectacled young man intensified. "I wish you'd come out and persuade him to go away," he said. "His language—*isn't* quite the thing—ladies."

"It never was," said the plump woman, her voice charged with sorrow.

Mr. Polly moved towards the door and stood with his

hand on the handle. The gold-spectacled face disappeared.

"Now, my man," came his voice from outside, "be careful what you're saying——"

"Oo in all the World and Hereafter are you to call me me man?" cried Uncle Jim, in the voice of one astonished and pained beyond endurance, and added scornfully, "You gold-eyed Geezer, you!"

"Tut, tut!" said the gentleman in gilt glasses. "Restrain yourself!"

Mr. Polly emerged, poker in hand, just in time to see what followed. Uncle Jim in his shirt-sleeves, and a state of ferocious decolletage, was holding something—yes!—a dead eel by means of a piece of newspaper about its tail, holding it down and back and a little sideways in such a way as to smite with it upward and hard. It struck the spectacled gentleman under the jaw with a peculiar dead thud, and a cry of horror came from the two seated parties at the sight. One of the girls shrieked piercingly, "Horace!" and everyone sprang up. The sense of helping numbers came to Mr. Polly's aid.

"Drop it!" he cried, and came down the steps waving his poker and thrusting the spectacled gentleman before him, as heretofore great heroes were wont to wield the ox-hide shield.

Uncle Jim gave ground suddenly, and trod upon the foot of a young man in a blue shirt, who immediately thrust at him violently with both hands.

"Lea go!" howled Uncle Jim. "That's the chap I'm looking for!" and pressing the head of the spectacled gentleman aside, smote hard at Mr. Polly.

But the sight of this indignity inflicted upon the spectacled gentleman a woman's heart was stirred, a pink parasol drove hard and true at Uncle Jim's wiry neck, and at the same moment the young man in the blue shirt sought to collar him, and lost his grip again.

"Suffragettes!" gasped Uncle Jim, with the ferrule at his throat. "Everywhere!" and aimed a second more successful blow at Mr. Polly.

"Wup!" said Mr. Polly.

But now the jam and egg party was joining in the fray. A stout, yet still fairly able-bodied gentleman in white and black checks inquired: "What's the fellow up to? Ain't there no

police here?" And it was evident that once more public opinion was rallying to the support of Mr. Polly.

"Oh, come on then, all the *lot* of you!" cried Uncle Jim, and backing dexterously, whirled the eel round in a destructive circle. The pink sunshade was torn from the hand that gripped it, and whirled athwart the complete but unadorned tea-things on the green table.

"Collar him! Someone get hold of his collar!" cried the gold-spectacled gentleman, retreating up the steps of the inn door as if to rally his forces.

"Stand clear, you blessed mantel ornaments!" cried Uncle Jim. "Stand clear!" and retired backing, staving off attack by means of the whirling eel.

Mr. Polly, undeterred by a sense of grave damage done to his nose, pressed the attack in front, the two young men in violet and blue skirmished on Uncle Jim's flanks, the man in white and black checks sought still further outflanking possibilities, and two of the apprentice boys ran for oars. The gold-spectacled gentleman, as if inspired, came down the wooden steps again, seized the tablecloth of the jam and egg party, lugged it from under the crockery with inadequate precautions against breakage, and advanced with compressed lips, curious lateral crouching movements, swift flashings of his glasses, and a general suggestion of bull-fighting in his pose and gestures. Uncle Jim was kept busy, and unable to plan his retreat with any strategic soundness. He was, moreover, manifestly a little nervous about the river in his rear. He gave ground in a curve, and so came right across the rapidly abandoned camp of the family in mourning, crunching teacups under his heel, oversetting the teapot, and finally tripping backwards over the hamper. The eel flew out at a tangent from his hand, and became a mere looping relic on the sward.

"Hold him!" cried the gentleman in spectacles. "Collar him!" and, moving forward with extraordinary promptitude, wrapped the best tablecloth about Uncle Jim's arms and head. Mr. Polly grasped his purpose instantly, the man in checks was scarcely slower, and in another moment Uncle Jim was no more than a bundle of smothered blasphemy, and a pair of wildly active legs.

"Duck him!" panted Mr. Polly, holding on to the earthquake. "Bes' thing—duck him."

The bundle was convulsed by paroxysms of anger and protest. One boot got the hamper and sent it ten yards.

"Go in the house for a clothes'-line, someone," said the gentleman in gold spectacles. "He'll get out of this in a moment."

One of the apprentices ran.

"Bird-nets in the garden," shouted Mr. Polly. "In the garden."

The apprentice was divided in his purpose.

And then suddenly Uncle Jim collapsed, and became a limp, dead-seeming thing under their hands. His arms were drawn inward, his legs bent up under his person, and so he lay.

"Fainted!" said the man in checks, relaxing his grip.

"A fit, perhaps," said the man in spectacles.

"Keep hold!" said Mr. Polly, too late.

For suddenly Uncle Jim's arms and legs flew out like springs released. Mr. Polly was tumbled backwards, and fell over the broken teapot, and into the arms of the father in mourning. Something struck his head—dazingly. In another second Uncle Jim was on his feet, and the tablecloth enshrouded the head of the man in checks. Uncle Jim manifestly considered he had done all that honour required of him; and against overwhelming numbers, and the possibility of reiterated duckings, flight is no disgrace.

Uncle Jim fled.

Mr. Polly sat up, after an interval of indeterminate length, among the ruins of an idyllic afternoon. Quite a lot of things seemed scattered and broken, but it was difficult to grasp it all at once. He stared between the legs of people. He became aware of a voice speaking slowly and complainingly.

"Someone ought to pay for those tea-things," said the father in mourning. "We didn't bring them 'ere to be danced on, not by no manner of means."

There followed an anxious peace for three days, and then a rough man in a blue jersey, in the intervals of trying to choke himself with bread and cheese and pickled onions, broke abruptly into information.

"Jim's lagged again, Missus," he said.

"What!" said the landlady. "Our Jim?"

"Your Jim," said the man; and after an absolutely necessary pause for swallowing, added, "Stealing a 'atchet."

He did not speak for some moments, and then he replied to Mr. Polly's inquiries: "Yes, a 'atchet. Down Lammam way—night before last."

"What'd 'e steal a 'atchet for?" asked the plump woman.

"'E said 'e wanted a 'atchet."

"I wonder what he wanted a hatchet for," said Mr. Polly thoughtfully.

"I dessay 'e 'ad a use for it," said the gentleman in the blue jersey, and he took a mouthful that amounted to conversational suicide. There was a prolonged pause in the little bar, and Mr. Polly did some rapid thinking.

He went to the window and whistled. "I shall stick it," he whispered at last, "'atchets or no 'atchets."

He turned to the man with the blue jersey, when he thought him clear for speech again. "How much did you say they'd given him?" he asked.

"Three munce," said the man in the blue jersey, and refilled anxiously, as if alarmed at the momentary clearness of his voice.

9

Those three months passed all too quickly—months of sunshine and warmth, of varied novel exertion in the open air, of congenial experiences, of interest and wholesome food and successful digestion; months that browned Mr. Polly and hardened him, and saw the beginnings of his beard! months marred only by one anxiety, an anxiety Mr. Polly did his utmost to suppress. The day of reckoning was never mentioned, it is true, by either the plump woman or himself, but the name of Uncle Jim was written in letters of glaring silence across their intercourse. As the term of that respite drew to an end, his anxiety increased, until at last it trenched upon his well-earned sleep. He had some idea of buying a revolver. He compromised upon a small and very foul and dirty rook-rifle, which he purchased in Lammam under a pretext of bird scaring, and loaded carefully and concealed under his bed from the plump woman's eye.

September passed away, October came.

And at last came that night in October whose happenings it is so difficult for a sympathetic historian to drag out of their proper nocturnal indistinctness into the clear, hard light of positive statement. A novelist should present characters, not vivisection them publicly. . . .

The best, the kindest, if not the justest course, is surely to leave untold such things as Mr. Polly would manifestly have preferred untold.

Mr. Polly has declared that when the cyclist discovered him he was seeking a weapon that should make a conclusive end to Uncle Jim. That declaration is placed before the reader without comment.

The gun was certainly in the possession of Uncle Jim at that time, and no human being but Mr. Polly knows how he got hold of it.

The cyclist was a literary man named Warspite, who suffered from insomnia; he had risen and come out of his house near Lammam just before the dawn, and he discovered Mr. Polly partially concealed in the ditch by the Potwell churchyard wall. It is an ordinary dry ditch full of nettles, and overgrown with elder and dog-rose, and in no way suggestive of an arsenal. It is the last place in which a sensible man would look for a gun. And he says that when he dismounted to see why Mr. Polly was allowing only the latter part of his person to show (and that, it would seem, by inadvertency), Mr. Polly merely raised his head and advised him to "Look out!" and added, "He's let fly at me twice already."

He came out under persuasion, and with gestures of extreme caution. He was wearing a white cotton nightgown of the type that has now been so extensively superseded by pyjama sleeping suits, and his legs and feet were bare, and much scratched and torn, and very muddy.

Mr. Warspite takes that exceptionally lively interest in his fellow-creatures which constitutes so much of the distinctive and complex charm of your novelist all the world over, and he at once involved himself generously in the case. The two men returned at Mr. Polly's initiative across the churchyard to the Potwell Inn, and came upon the burst and damaged rook rifle near the new monument to Sir Samuel Harpon at the corner by the yew.

"That must have been his third go," said Mr. Polly. "It sounded a bit funny."

The sight inspired him greatly, and he explained further that he had fled to the churchyard on account of the cover afforded by tombstones from the flight of small shot. He expressed anxiety for the fate of the landlady of the Potwell Inn and her grandchild, and led the way with enhanced alacrity along the lane to that establishment.

They found the doors of the house standing open, the bar in some disorder—several bottles of whisky were afterwards found to be missing—and Blake, the village policeman, rapping patiently at the open door. He entered with them. The glass in the bar had suffered severely, and one of the mirrors was starred from a blow from a pewter pot. The till had been forced and ransacked, and so had the bureau in the minute room behind the bar.

An upper window was opened, and the voice of the landlady became audible making inquiries. They went out and parleyed with her. She had locked herself upstairs with the little girl, she said, and refused to descend until she was assured that neither Uncle Jim nor Mr. Polly's gun was anywhere on the premises. Mr. Blake and Mr. Warspite proceeded to satisfy themselves with regard to the former condition, and Mr. Polly went to his room in search of garments more suited to the brightening dawn. He returned immediately with a request that Blake and Mr. Warspite would "just come and look." They found the apartment in a state of extraordinary confusion, the bed-clothes in a ball in the corner, the drawers all open and ransacked, the chair broken, the lock of the door forced and broken, one door panel slightly scorched and perforated by shot, and the window wide open. None of Mr. Polly's clothes were to be seen, but some garments which had apparently once formed part of a stoker's workaday outfit, two brownish-yellow halves of a shirt, and an unsound pair of boots, were scattered on the floor. A faint smell of gunpowder still hung in the air, and two or three books Mr. Polly had recently acquired had been shied with some violence under the bed. Mr. Warspite looked at Mr. Blake, and then both men looked at Mr. Polly. "That's *his* boots," said Mr. Polly.

Blake turned his eyes to the window. "Some of these tiles 'ave just got broken," he observed.

"I got out of the window and slid down the scullery tiles," Mr. Polly answered, omitting much, they both felt, from his explanation. . . .

"Well, we better find 'im and 'ave a word with 'im," said Blake. "That's about my business now."

10

But Uncle Jim had gone altogether. . . .

He did not return for some days. That, perhaps, was not very wonderful. But the days lengthened to weeks, and the weeks to months, and still Uncle Jim did not recur. A year passed, and the anxiety of him became less acute; a second healing year followed the first. One afternoon about thirty months after the Night Surprise the plump woman spoke of him.

"I wonder what's become of Jim," she said.

"I wonder sometimes," said Mr. Polly.

11

One summer afternoon, about five years after his first coming to the Potwell Inn, Mr. Polly found himself sitting under the pollard willow, fishing for dace. It was a plumper, browner, and healthier Mr. Polly altogether than the miserable bankrupt with whose dyspeptic portrait our novel opened. He was fat, but with a fatness more generally diffused, and the lower part of his face was touched to gravity by a small, square beard. Also he was balder.

It was the first time he had found leisure to fish, though from the very outset of his Potwell career he had promised himself abundant indulgence in the pleasures of fishing. Fishing, as the golden page of English literature testifies, is a meditative and retrospective pursuit, and the varied page of memory, disregarded so long for sake of the teeming duties I have already enumerated, began to unfold itself to Mr. Polly's consideration. A speculation about Uncle Jim died for want of material, and gave place to a reckoning of the years and months that had passed since his coming to Potwell, and that to a philosophical review of his life. He began to

think about Miriam, remotely and impersonally. He remembered many things that had been neglected by his conscience during the busier times, as, for example, that he had committed arson and deserted a wife. For the first time he looked these long-neglected facts in the face.

It is disagreeable to think one has committed arson, because it is an action that leads to jail. Otherwise I do not think there was a grain of regret for that in Mr. Polly's composition. But deserting Miriam was in a different category. Deserting Miriam was mean.

This is a history, and not a glorification of Mr. Polly, and I tell of things as they were with him. Apart from the disagreeable twinge arising from the thought of what might happen if he was found out, he had not the slightest remorse about that fire. Arson, after all, is an artificial crime. Some crimes are crimes in themselves, would be crimes without any law, the cruelties, mockery, the breaches of faith that astonish and wound, but the burning of things is in itself neither good nor bad. A large number of houses deserve to be burnt, most modern furniture, an overwhelming majority of pictures and books—one might go on for some time with the list. If our community was collectively anything more than a feeble idiot, it would burn most of London and Chicago, for example, and build sane and beautiful cities in the place of these pestilential heaps of rotten private property. I have failed in presenting Mr. Polly altogether if I have not made you see that he was in many respects an artless child of Nature, far more untrained, undisciplined, and spontaneous than an ordinary savage. And he was really glad, for all that little drawback of fear, that he had had the courage to set fire to his house, and fly, and come to the Potwell Inn.

But he was not glad he had left Miriam. He had seen Miriam cry once or twice in his life, and it had always reduced him to abject commiseration. He now imagined her crying. He perceived in a perplexed way that he had made himself responsible for her life. He forgot how she had spoilt his own. He had hitherto rested in the faith that she had over a hundred pounds of insurance money, but now, with his eye meditatively upon his float, he realized a hundred pounds does not last for ever. His conviction of her incompetence was unflinching; she was bound to have fooled it away somehow by this time. And then!

He saw her humping her shoulders, and sniffing in a manner he had always regarded as detestable at close quarters, but which now became harrowingly pitiful.

"Damn!" said Mr. Polly, and down went his float, and he flicked a victim to destruction, and took it off the hook.

He compared his own comfort and health with Miriam's imagined distress.

"Ought to have done something for herself," said Mr. Polly, re-baiting his hook. "She was always talking of doing things. Why couldn't she?"

He watched the float oscillating gently towards quiescence.

"Silly to begin thinking about her," he said. "Damn silly!"

But once he had begun thinking about her, he had to go on.

"Oh, blow!" cried Mr. Polly presently, and pulled up his hook, to find another fish had just snatched at it in the last instant. His handling must have made the poor thing feel itself unwelcome.

He gathered his things together and turned towards the house.

All the Potwell Inn betrayed his influence now, for here, indeed, he had found his place in the world. It looked brighter, so bright, indeed, as to be almost skittish, with the white and green paint he had lavished upon it. Even the garden palings were striped white and green, and so were the boats; for Mr. Polly was one of those who find a positive sensuous pleasure in the laying on of paint. Left and right were two large boards, which had done much to enhance the inn's popularity with the lighter-minded variety of pleasure-seekers. Both marked innovations. One bore in large letters the single word "Museum," the other was as plain and laconic with "Omlets." The spelling of the latter word was Mr. Polly's own; but when he had seen a whole boat-load of men, intent on Lammam for lunch, stop open-mouthed, and stare, and grin, and come in and ask in a marked sarcastic manner for "omlets," he perceived that his inaccuracy had done more for the place than his utmost cunning could have contrived. In a year or so the inn was known both up and down the river by its new name of "Omlets," and Mr. Polly, after some secret irritation, smiled,

and was content. And the fat woman's omelettes were things to remember.

(You will note I have changed her epithet. Time works upon us all.)

She stood upon the steps as he came towards the house, and smiled at him richly.

"Caught many?" she asked.

"Got an idea," said Mr. Polly. "Would it put you out very much if I went off for a day or two for a bit of a holiday? There won't be much doing now until Thursday."

12

Feeling recklessly secure behind his beard, Mr. Polly surveyed the Fishbourne High Street once again. The north side was much as he had known it, except that the name of Rusper had vanished. A row of new shops replaced the destruction of the great fire. Mantell and Throbsons' had risen again upon a more flamboyant pattern, and the new fire station was in the Swiss Teutonic style, with much red paint; next door, in the place of Rumbold's, was a branch of the Colonial Tea Company, and then a Salmon and Gluckstein Tobacco Shop, and then a little shop that displayed sweets, and professed a "Tea Room Upstairs." He considered this as a possible place in which to prosecute inquiries about his lost wife, wavering a little between it and the God's Providence Inn down the street. Then his eye caught the name over the window. "Polly," he read, "& Larkins! Well, I'm—astonished!"

A momentary faintness came upon him. He walked past, and down the street, returned, and surveyed the shop again.

He saw a middle-aged, rather untidy woman standing behind the counter, who for an instant he thought might be Miriam terribly changed, and then recognized as his sister-in-law Annie, filled out, and no longer hilarious. She stared at him without a sign of recognition as he entered the shop.

"Can I have tea?" said Mr. Polly.

"Well," said Annie, "you *can*. But our Tea Room's upstairs. . . . My sister's been cleaning it out—and it's a bit upset."

"It *would* be," said Mr. Polly softly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Annie.

"I said I didn't mind. Up here?"

"I dare say there'll be a table," said Annie, and followed him up to a room whose conscientious disorder was intensely reminiscent of Miriam.

"Nothing like turning everything upside down when you're cleaning," said Mr. Polly cheerfully.

"It's my sister's way," said Annie impartially. "She's gone out for a bit of air, but I dare say she'll be back soon to finish. It's a nice light room when it's tidy. Can I put you a table over there?"

"Let *me*," said Mr. Polly, and assisted.

He sat down by the open window and drummed on the table and meditated on his next step, while Annie vanished to get his tea. After all, things didn't seem so bad with Miriam. He tried over several gambits in imagination.

"Unusual name," he said, as Annie laid a cloth before him.

Annie looked interrogation.

"Polly. Polly and Larkins. Real, I suppose?"

"Polly's my sister's name. She married a Mr. Polly."

"Widow, I presume?" said Mr. Polly.

"Yes. This five years—come October."

"Lord!" said Mr. Polly, in unfeigned surprise.

"Found drowned he was. There was a lot of talk in the place."

"Never heard of it," said Mr. Polly. "I'm a stranger—rather."

"In the Medway near Maidstone it was. He must have been in the water for days. Wouldn't have known him, my sister wouldn't, if it hadn't been for the name sewn in his clothes. All whitey and eat away he was."

"Bless my heart! Must have been rather a shock for her."

"It *was* a shock," said Annie, and added darkly, "But sometimes a shock's better than a long agony."

"No doubt," said Mr. Polly.

He gazed with a rapt expression at the preparations before him. "So I'm drowned," something was saying inside him. "Life insured?" he asked.

"We started the tea-rooms with it," said Annie.

Why, if things were like this, had remorse and anxiety for Miriam been implanted in his soul? No shadow of an answer appeared.

"Marriage is a lottery," said Mr. Polly.

"*She* found it so," said Annie. "Would you like some jam?"

"I'd like an egg," said Mr. Polly. "I'll have two. I've got a sort of feeling— As though I wanted keeping up. . . . Wasn't particularly good sort, this Mr. Polly?"

"He was a *wearing* husband," said Annie. "I've often pitied my sister. He was one of that sort——"

"Dissolute?" suggested Mr. Polly faintly.

"No," said Annie judiciously, "not exactly dissolute. Feeble's more the word. Weak, 'e was. Weak as water. 'Ow long do you like your eggs boiled?"

"Four minutes exactly," said Mr. Polly.

"One gets talking," said Annie.

"One does," said Mr. Polly, and she left him to his thoughts.

What perplexed him was his recent remorse and tenderness for Miriam. Now he was back in her atmosphere, all that had vanished, and the old feeling of helpless antagonism returned. He surveyed the piled furniture, the economically managed carpet, the unpleasant pictures on the wall. Why had he felt remorse. Why had he entertained this illusion of a helpless woman crying aloud in the pitiless darkness for him? He peered into the unfathomable mysteries of the heart, and ducked back to a smaller issue. *Was* he feeble? Hang it! He'd known feebler people by far!

The eggs came up. Nothing in Annie's manner invited a resumption of the discussion.

"Business brisk?" he ventured to ask.

Annie reflected. "It is," she said, "and it isn't. It's like that."

"Ah!" said Mr. Polly and squared himself to his egg. "Was there an inquest on that chap?"

"What chap?"

"What was his name?—Polly!"

"Of course."

"You're sure it was him?"

"What do you mean?"

Annie looked at him hard, and suddenly his soul was black with terror.

"Who else could it have been—in the very clo'es 'e wore?"

"Of course," said Mr. Polly, and began his egg. He was so agitated that he only realized its condition when he was half-way through it, and Annie safely downstairs.

"Lord!" he said, reaching out hastily for the pepper. "One of Miriam's! Management! I haven't tasted such an egg for five years. . . . Wonder where she gets them! Picks them out, I suppose."

He abandoned it for its fellow.

Except for a slight mustiness, the second egg was very palatable indeed. He was getting to the bottom of it as Miriam came in. He looked up. "Nice afternoon," he said, at her stare, and perceived she knew him at once by the gesture and the voice. She went white, and shut the door behind her. She looked as though she was going to faint. Mr. Polly sprang up quickly, and handed her a chair. "My God!" she whispered, and crumpled up, rather than sat down.

"It's *you*," she said.

"No," said Mr. Polly very earnestly, "it isn't. It just looks like me. That's all."

"I *know* that man wasn't you—all along. I tried to think it was. I tried to think perhaps the water had altered your wrists and feet, and the colour of your hair."

"Ah!"

"I'd always feared you'd come back."

Mr. Polly sat down by his egg. "I haven't come back," he said very earnestly. "Don't you think it?"

"'Ow we'll pay back the Insurance now, I *don't* know."

She was weeping. She produced a handkerchief, and covered her face.

"Look here, Miriam," said Mr. Polly. "I haven't come back, and I'm not coming back. I'm—I'm a Visitant from Another World. You shut up about me, and I'll shut up about myself. I came back because I thought you might be hard up, or in trouble, or some silly thing like that. Now I see you again—I'm satisfied. I'm satisfied completely. See? I'm going to absquatulate, see? Hey Presto, right away."

He turned to his tea for a moment, finished his cup noisily, stood up.

"Don't you think you're going to see me again," he said, "for you ain't."

He moved to the door.

"That ~~was~~ a tasty egg," he said hovered for a second and vanished. . . .

Annie was in the shop.

"The missus has had a bit of a shock," he remarked. "Got some sort of fancy about a ghost. Can't make it out quite. So long!"

And he had gone.

13

Mr. Polly sat beside the fat woman at one of the little green tables at the back of the Potwell Inn, and struggled with the mystery of life. It was one of those evenings serenely luminous, amply and atmospherically still, when the river bend was at its best. A swan floated against the dark green masses of the further bank, the stream flowed broad and shining to its destiny, with scarce a ripple—except where the reeds came out from the headland, and the three poplars rose clear and harmonious against the sky of green and yellow. It was as if everything lay securely within a great, warm, friendly globe of crystal sky. It was as safe and enclosed and fearless as a child that has still to be born. It was an evening full of quality of tranquil, unqualified assurance. Mr. Polly's mind was filled with the persuasion that indeed all things whatsoever must needs be satisfying and complete. It was incredible that life had ever done more than seemed to jar, that there could be any shadow in life save such velvet softnesses as made the setting for that silent swan, or any murmur but the ripple of the water as it swirled round the chained and gently swaying punt. And the mind of Mr. Polly, exalted and made tender by this atmosphere, sought gently, but sought, to draw together the varied memories that came drifting, half submerged, across the circle of his mind.

He spoke in words that seemed like a bent and broken stick thrust suddenly into water, destroying the mirror of the shapes they sought. "Jim's not coming back again ever," he said. "He got drowned five years ago."

"Where?" asked the fat woman, surprised.

"Miles from here. In the Medway. Away in Kent."

"Lor!" said the fat woman.

"It's right enough," said Mr. Polly.

"How d'you know?"

"I went to my home."

"Where?"

"Don't matter. I went and found out. He'd been in the water some days. He'd got my clothes, and they'd said it was me."

"They?"

"It don't matter. I'm not going back to them."

The fat woman regarded him silently for some time. Her expression of scrutiny gave way to a quiet satisfaction. Then her brown eyes went to the river.

"Poor Jim," she said. "'E 'adn't much Tact—ever."

She added mildly, "I can't 'ardly say I'm sorry."

"Nor me," said Mr. Polly, and got a step nearer the thought in him. "But it don't seem much good his having been alive, does it?"

"'E wasn't much good," the fat woman admitted. "Ever."

"I suppose there were things that were good to him," Mr. Polly speculated. "They weren't *our* things."

His hold slipped again. "I often wonder about life," he said weakly.

He tried again. "One seems to start in life," he said, "expecting something. And it doesn't happen. And it doesn't matter. One starts with ideas that things are good and things are bad—and it hasn't much relation to what *is* good and what *is* bad. I've always been the skeptaceous sort, and it's always seemed rot to me to pretend men know good from evil. It's just what I've *never* done. No Adam's apple stuck in *my* throat, Ma'am. I don't own to it."

He reflected.

"I set fire to a house—once."

The fat woman started.

"I don't feel sorry for it. I don't believe it was a bad thing to do—any more than burning a toy, like I did once when I was a baby. I nearly killed myself with a razor. Who hasn't?—anyhow gone as far as thinking of it? Most of my time I've been half dreaming. I married like a dream almost. I've never really planned my life, or set out to live. I happened; things happened to me. It's so with every

one. Jim couldn't help himself. I shot at him, and tried to kill him. I dropped the gun and he got it. He very nearly had me. I wasn't a second too soon—ducking. . . . Awkward—that night was. . . . Ma'am. . . . But I don't blame him—come to that. Only I don't see what it's all up to. . . .

"Like children playing about in a nursery. Hurt themselves at times. . . .

"There's something that doesn't mind us," he resumed presently. "It isn't what we try to get that we get, it isn't the good we think we do is good. What makes us happy isn't our trying, what makes others happy isn't our trying. There's a sort of character people like, and stand up for, and a sort they won't. You got to work it out, and take the consequences. . . . Miriam was always trying."

"Who was Miriam?" asked the fat woman.

"No one you know. But she used to go about with her brows knit, trying not to do whatever she wanted to do—if ever she did want to do anything——"

He lost himself.

"You can't help being fat," said the fat woman, after a pause, trying to get up to his thoughts.

"*You* can't," said Mr. Polly.

"It helps, and it hinders."

"Like my upside down way of talking."

"The magistrates wouldn't 'ave kept on the licence to me if I 'adn't been fat. . . ."

"Then what have we done," said Mr. Polly, "to get an evening like this? Lord! Look at it!" He sent his arm round the great curve of the sky.

"If I was a nigger or an Italian I should come out here and sing. I whistle sometimes, but, bless you, it's singing I've got in my mind. Sometimes I think I live for sunsets."

"I don't see that it does you any good always looking at sunsets, like you do," said the fat woman.

"Nor me. But I do. Sunsets and things I was made to like."

"They don't help you," said the fat woman thoughtfully.

"Who cares?" said Mr. Polly.

A deeper strain had come to the fat woman. "You got to die some day," she said.

"Some things I can't believe," said Mr. Polly suddenly,

"and one is your being a skeleton. . . ." He pointed his hand towards the neighbour's hedge. "Look at 'em—against the yellow—and they're just stingin' nettles. Nasty weeds—if you count things by their uses. And no help in the life hereafter. But just look at the look of them!"

"It isn't only looks," said the fat woman.

"Whenever there's signs of a good sunset, and I'm not too busy," said Mr. Polly, "I'll come and sit out here."

The fat woman looked at him with eyes in which contentment struggled with some obscure reluctant protest, and at last turned them slowly to the black nettle pagodas against the golden sky.

"I wish we could," she said.

"I will."

The fat woman's voice sank nearly to the inaudible.

"Not always," she said.

Mr. Polly was some time before he replied. "Come here always, when I'm a ghost," he replied.

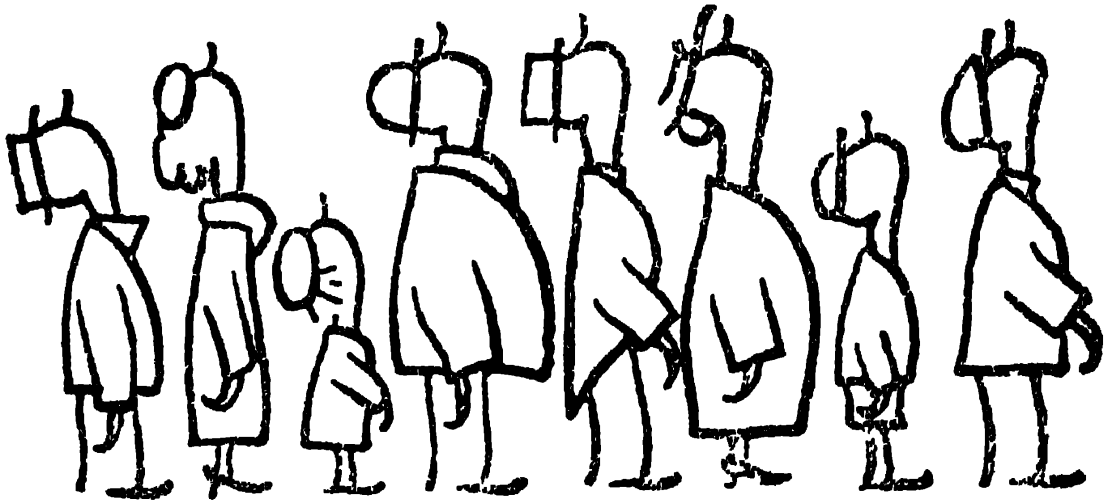
"Spoil the place for others," said the fat woman, abandoning her moral solitudes for a more congenial point of view.

"Not my sort of ghost wouldn't," said Mr. Polly, emerging from another long pause. "I'd be a sort of diaphanous feeling—just mellowish and warmish like. . . ."

They said no more, but sat on in the warm twilight, until at last they could scarcely distinguish each other's faces. They were not so much thinking, as lost in a smooth, still quiet of the mind. A bat flitted by.

"Time we was going in, O' Party," said Mr. Polly, standing up. "Supper to get. It's as you say, we can't sit here for ever."

MR. WALKER'S AEROPLANE



ARTHUR MORRISON

ARTHUR MORRISON is well-known as a novelist, dramatist and writer on Oriental art. His extensive collection of Chinese and Japanese paintings is now in the British Museums. His stories of life in the slums of the East End of London are particularly notable.

MR. WALKER'S AEROPLANE

THERE is a bow window in the parlour of the Padfield Arms which gives a view of the village street on one hand and of the open road and the fields on the other. Either way offers an attractive walk to an idle man, and I stood in the window in the mood that induces such a man to toss up for it. But a man may be even too idle to toss up, and I left the decision to two unconscious arbitrators ; Dan'l Robgent, who, with his stick and his rheumatics, was approaching from the village street, and an unknown bicyclist who was coming up the road from Codham, with many swerves and wobbles, occasioned by desperate twisting of the neck and staring at the sky. Dan'l was close, the bicyclist was comparatively far. Which would pass the window first ? With a brisk pedestrian and a cyclist intent on his journey, a dead-heat would seem likely ; but Dan'l's rheumatics and the cyclist's interest in the heavens introduced factors of uncertainty and gave the chance a sporting interest.

Dan'l Robgent paused and rubbed his toe tenderly with his stick—he was losing ground ; but after that refreshment he came on with quite a spurt, and the cyclist brought down his gaze and made a wild swerve to save his balance.

In the end the victory lay with the unwitting Dan'l by the mere distance of the window from the inn door ; for there the two met, and the bicyclist dismounted to ask Dan'l some question which was ungraciously received.

"No," I heard Dan'l say, very severely, "I *hain't* seen no hairyplane, so there !"

The bicyclist grinned.

"All right," he answered. "Keep your hair on, oad 'un ! I didn't mean oad Taff-Pilcher's !"

And with that he turned to his machine and drifted up the village street.

There were military manœuvres in this part of Essex, and

a rumour had been heard that aeroplanes were to fly; and this was at a time, before the great war, when aeroplanes were a strange novelty. So that I wondered at Dan'l's indignation as he came stumping into the parlour, grumbling vaguely. I ventured a question.

"That young monkey comes from Codham," said Dan'l Robgent, "an' when a Codham man talks about hairyplanes to a Padfield man that means impidence. Speeches o' chaff, I s'pose they call it; but I call it impidence, to a man oad enough to be his father."

I put my stick in a corner and sat down. Dan'l Robgent sat down, too, and in response to my well-understood signal a mug was planted under his nose ere he was fully settled. He received the mug with a well-bred affectation of surprise, as usual, and wished me excellent health.

"Well," I said, "and who is old Taff-Pilcher?"

"Mr. Taff-Pilcher, sir," said Dan'l, with grave reproof, "is Parlyment candidate for this 'ere division, and a very nice genelman. Them chaps at Codham don't 'preciate him, Codham not bein' in this votin' division, though only three mile off. Mr. Taff-Pilcher looks arter *our* interests, as is proper, not the Codham people's; and it's my belief he'll be member after next election, he's made hisself that popular. And when he is we shall be all right—them as votes for Mr. Taff-Pilcher, anyway. We shall all get summat for our votes, we shall; we shan't be wheedled out of 'em for nothin' same as we bin ever since I had a vote."

"How much are you to get?" I asked.

"'Tain't legal for a genelman to mention the 'zact amount, no more than 'tain't legal for a genelman to pay it hisself. He's a lawyer, is Mr. Taff-Pilcher, and he knows the law thorough. I've heard my oad father say, in his time, when the law was different, the price o' votes dropped from a sovereign to five shillum paid down afore you went in; then that got to half a crown an' less, an' then nothin' at all. Wholly shameful it was—and has been all my time. But Mr. Taff-Pilcher's a free-hearted genelman, and he's goin' to see things put right again; an' as he won't be payin' hisself he ain't under no temptation to keep it low. And there's goin' to be ashfelt in Padfield street, and 'lectric light, and ping-pong in the workus."

"But what about his aeroplane?"

"Well, 'twasn't 'zactly his, so to speak, but one as he wasn't able to send. You see, he's always been special kind and attentive, has Mr. Taff-Pilcher. It was only a accident that he didn't get the Lord Mayor o' Lunnon hisself down to give away the school prizes, an' he's the very best cricket umpire we ever had on the field here, an' football, too. Fine, he is, straight and fair allus, with just a *leetle* leanin' towards Padfield, when that ain't too noticeable. That's what I like to see—a perfect fair umpire as won't give it agin his own side if he can help it. That's the sort we want."

"And Codham doesn't?" I interjected, for the rivalry of Padfield and Codham was intense in cricket and football as in everything else.

"They're jealous; Codhamites allus are. I dunno what they expect; if they'd got any sense o' fairness they'd see that *their* votes ain't no good to him. But it was about the hairyplane I was tellin' you. It was in the annual sports—you know what a time we have here at Padfield sports every year. There ain't nothin' like that for miles round, and ain't been since they stopped Codham Fair. Well, it's wonderful how Mr. Taff-Pilcher went into them sports. We made him judge, o' course, seein' how good he was as umpire, an' that paid us. And he helped us wonderful other ways, too. He didn't pay for no prizes, you understand, nor suscribe nothin', 'cos that's all agin his principles. He's very partic'lar about his principles, is Mr. Taff-Pilcher, an' the one we found out about first was that it's wrong for him to pay out anything in this 'ere constitoency, bein' same as a speeches o' bribery as he couldn't stoop to. But, lor', you'd never ha' minded if you'd seen him givin' the prizes away after the sports; you'd ha' believed he'd give the hull lot out of his own pocket, the handsome way he did it and the generous way he talked. And it was just the same all through; nobody ever knew before what unimportant sort o' people the squire and the passon was till they see Mr. Taff-Pilcher a-puttin' of 'em in the shade at the sports.

"He stuck to his principles about not suscribin' money, but nobody could call him mean when it was give out he was goin' to send a hairyplane. Everybody knowed what a expensive thing a hairyplane was, and them chaps as go up in 'em allus charge about a thousand pound a time. He made a little speech about it afore the sports began. He said we

was livin' in stirrin' times, and the march o' progress was astonishin' to be'old. He told us that man, not content with sailin' the stormy deep and travellin' on the firmer terra cotta, had now took to hisself wings to cleave the infinite expense. He said that he was proud and happy to say that a hairyplane was on its way to the spot he loved dearest on earth (meanin' Padfield) at about a hundred an' fifty mile an hour, and conskently might be expected any time in the arternoon, bein' driv by a most noted flyin' genelman o' the name o' Walker. If Mr. Walker successfully braved the perils of the windy element, he said, in his journey from Lunnon, we should hev the glory and delight o' seein' him come a-swoopin' down in graceful circles same as a heagle or a harchangel on to Padfield. It 'ud be agin his principles, he said, to say anythink about the tremenjous expense o' givin' us sich a treat as that, but he hoped we wouldn't forget it. And then we cheered terrific, and the sports began.

"All Padfield and half Codham must ha' gone to bed with stiff necks that night, and I wonder most o' the necks wasn't broke afore they got home. Half the things in the refreshment tent was ate by boys while the chaps in charge was starin' up lookin' for the hairyplane. Them as tried to look for the hairyplane and see the races too got it worst, and you'd think they ought to ha' broke their necks unanimous. Mr. Taff-Pilcher, he was very eager about it, too, as you'd expect; but he didn't let that prevent him bein' faithful to Padfield as judge o' the sports. O' course a judge can't do very much for his pals, even in a country sports where things ain't done particular; but what any judge could do Mr. Taff-Pilcher did, and did wonnerful neat, too. In the final o' the hundred yards' race, when young Bill Parker was comin' up neck and neck with a Codham chap, Bill bein' on the side nearest the judge, it was beautiful to see how he changed the tape from his left to his right hand, just casual like, as he turned round to speak to a committee-man, and just brought it up agin Bill Parker's chest by about six inches. It was one o' the good-naturedest things ever I see done. And he was just as thoughtful all through. I could see it, havin' been in all that when I was a young man, and knowed the comfort of havin' a friendly judge when you're a-takin' off for the long jump, or got a little dab o' cobbler's wax in

the spoon in the egg-and-spoon race. But them Codham chaps took it downright spiteful.

"The arternoon went on, and most o' the sports was over, one after another, and everybody sick and giddy a-starin' at the sky, when there come a telegram for Mr. Taff-Pilcher. That come jist as the sack race was finishin' and there was nothin' more left but the tug-o'-war between Padfield an' Codham. That was allus last, an' a most howlin' outrageous tussle allus, 'cos whichever side wins crow'd over the other for the rest o' the year.

"Well, the telegram come, an' Mr. Taff-Pilcher, he read it, an' took off his hat an' wiped his head and showed the telegram to the committee, an' their faces went as long as fourpenny kites. Everybody saw as something was up, an' some said the hairyplane man was killed for certain, an' what a pity that didn't happen where we could all see it. And then Mr. Taff-Pilcher got up on a chair an' called all the crowd round him an' made another speech. He said it grieved him to the 'art to have to announce that he had just received a telegram from Mr. Walker, saying that his sky-hooks had give way and jammed his wind-sifter, so that he wouldn't be able to get as far as Padfield. Nothin' as could have occurred would ha' grieved him wuss, unless it was that a accident might ha' happened to Mr. Walker instead of his sky-hooks an' his wind-sifter. He need hardly say how 'art-broke he was to see us all disappointed, an' he hoped, at any rate, we wouldn't blame him as was so devoted to our interests. He could only say that after his first pang o' grief at seein' us disappointed his next feelin' was one of 'artfelt thankfulness that Mr. Walker was safe, an' he was sure them was our sentiments, too.

"You never heard sich a shindy o' cheerin' as we give Mr. Taff-Pilcher arter that speech; we cheered him louder than what we'd ha' cheered the hairyplane itself if that had ha' come, an' he was a greater favourite than ever—jist as popular as if that had come. But them Codham chaps was nasty about it, o' course. Sniffed an' snarled an' sneered, they did, an' said there was no flies on oad Taff-Pilcher, an' a telegram came a mighty deal cheaper than a hairyplane. Fair sickenin' to hear 'em, that was; you wouldn't believe people could be so ungrateful.

"It made the Padfield chaps pretty wild, an' they went at

the tug-o'-war that savage that they pulled the Codham team over right bang off the first pull, as soon as Mr. Taff-Pilcher give the word, an' the crowd cheered louder'n ever. Then they crossed over for the second pull, but this time the Codham chaps was all ready, an' wouldn't be done on the rush. It was a long pull an' a tough pull, and it went agin Padfield. That made things ekal, an' the crowd went half frantic when they crossed again for the last pull. This time Mr. Taff-Pilcher quite see what a lot depended on him, and he started 'em very slow and impartial. He had all sorts of a long trouble gettin' the red rag on the rope 'zactly over the mark, an' then when he give warnin' to take a strain it got off again an' he had to begin afresh; an' so on for a minute or two, till at last Jim Bartrip, the biggest chap on the Codham side, he starts sneezin', an' 'Pull!' bawls Mr. Taff-Pilcher at the top of his voice, jist in the nick of time. Lor'! Them Codham chaps jist come over hand over hand like a row o' sacks, Jim Bartrip a-sneezin' an' a-cussin' an' a-scufflin' to get his feet under him, an' everybody on the field howlin' an' dancin' like mad.

"Well, there's no satisfyin' some people. The row them Codham chaps made over losin' that tug-o'-war was positive disgraceful, an' there might almost ha' been a fight if most o' the crowd hadn't been Padfield people. Codham chaps was allus bad losers. They even tried booin' Mr. Taff-Pilcher when he give away the prizes, but that only made the cheers twice as loud, an' at last he was chaired off the field an' all the way to the station. That was the greatest day ever he had in Padfield, an' if the 'lection had been the day after he'd ha' been our member now.

"Well, the prize for the tug-o'-war was a side o' bacon, an' the team was eight. Bedlow, the landlord here, was one o' the team, an' late in the evenin' they brought the side o' bacon here to divide; and with that came trouble. There hadn't never been a side o' bacon give for a prize before, an' it never struck nobody there'd be any difficulty in cuttin' it in eight parts: an' p'r'aps there mightn't ha' been if they hadn't called in Huxon, the butcher, to do it. But Huxon was that professional an' scientific there was no on' anythink with him. It was agin all the rules, it seemed, to divide a side o' bacon into eight parts. You could divide it into three parts, or five parts, or nine or thirteen; but anythin' else 'ud

be unconstitootional. An' what was more, all them parts was different sizes. It was no good argufyin' with Huxon; no amount o' argufyin' 'ud bring Huxon to go agin the principles of a lifetime.

" 'There's fore-end, middle, an' gammon,' he said, obstinit as pig itself. 'Or there's hock, an' collar, an' two streakies, an' back, an' ribs, an' loin, an' flank, an' gammon, an' corner. An' you can cut your collar in two, an' your loin in two, an' your back in two, an' your streaky in three. An' that's the way pigs is made, an' pigs is bacon, an' you can't cut 'em different, whichever way you go, nohow an' notsoever!'

"Not only was there no argufyin' with Huxon, but he got that excited what between sports day an' laws o' the trade an' wettin' the occasion that presently there was no shuttin' him up, and at closin' time he had to be shoved out forcible, an' went off up the street, shoutin', 'There's hock, an' collar, an' two streakies, an' back, an' ribs, an' loin, an' flank, an' gammon,' an' all the rest on it at the top of his voice.

"So Bedlow shut the door an' told the rest o' the team they was there as his friends till the pint was settled, for the sake o' the licence. And they put the side o' the bacon on the table an' sat all round it for about two hours, plannin' out the cuts, till it turned out as nobody particular wanted the hock an' the whole team was in competition for the gammon. That made a wuss confusion than ever, an' in the middle of it there came a loud tap at the winder, an' everybody jumped. Bedlow jumped highest, 'cos of his licence, though he made sure the p'liceman must be in bed long ago. But when they shoved up the winder there was a chap standin' outside all muffled up in jerseys an' sweaters an' sich, with his head all tied up in ear-flaps an' what-not, an' a big pair o' glass goggles all over his face.

" 'Come and hold my hairyplane,' says the chap. 'It's in a field along here, an' the wind's gettin' up.'

" 'What?' says Bedlow.

" 'Didn't expect me, I s'pose,' says the chap. 'I'm late, that's all. I ought to ha' been here this afternoon, but my sky-hooks give way and jammed my wind-sifter. My name's Walker.'

"Them eight big chaps was that amazed you might ha' blown 'em all over with a pea-shooter.

"'We—we thought you wasn't comin'," says Bedlow.

"'Oh, I allus turn up, sooner or later,' says the chap. 'I don't stop as long as I can get my engine to go an' my sky-hooks to hold firm. The repairs kep' me hours an' hours. But can you chaps pull—hard?'"

"'Rather!' says Bedlow.

"'Quite sure?' says Mr. Walker.

"'Well, we won the tug-o'-war to-day, anyhow,' says Bedlow.

"'That's your sort,' says Mr. Walker. 'Come along quick, 'f'r the hairyplane gets damaged. I've got my mechanic with me, but it wants all the lot of us to hold it down safe.'

"'They all went bundlin' out in the dark, an' he took 'em along the road to Wicks's little three-cornered meddy with the oad stack in it. Half-way they met another muffled-up chap with goggles.

"'Here, Jones,' says Mr. Walker, 'you ought to ha' kep' with the hairyplane. Is she all right?'"

"'Yes, sir,' says the man—'all right as yet. But she lifts awful with every puff o' wind, an' she'll want a lot o' holding.'

"'All right, Jones, we'll hold it,' says Mr. Walker. 'Look here, four of you come with me, and the other four go with my man round to the other side o' the field.'

"'So they split out, an' each party went along the outside o' the hedge, till Mr. Walker gropes about an' finds a rope.

"'Here y'are,' he says. 'Stop on this side o' the hedge an' catch hold o' this. Get behind each other an' take a good hold—you'll have some hard pullin' presently. But don't pull till I give you the word. I'm goin' over with my man to see the tackle's all right.'

"'With that he climbs over the hedge an' disappears in the dark. Presently they could hear him a-shoutin' to his man an' callin' out orders, an' after a little he comes back to his side o' the hedge an' calls out, 'All ready, Jones?'"

"'Yes, sir,' sings out Jones, over at the other side o' the field. 'I'll cast off as soon as they pull.'

"'Right,' says Mr. Walker. 'All you chaps ready, both sides? Pull!'"

"'With that they pulled like all possessed, Mr. Walker steadyin' the rope on his side o' the hedge an' encouragin' 'em.

"‘That’s right,’ he said, ‘keep a steady draw on her. She’s pullin’ now, ain’t she?’

"‘Aye, that she is,’ says Bedlow, hangin’ on for all he was worth. ‘I shouldn’t ha’ thought there could be sich a wind a night like this.’

"‘Oh, any sort of a little breeze is terrific, once it gets under a hairyplane,’ says Mr. Walker. ‘All right, steady; don’t jerk. Just a steady, even pull’s what’s wanted. This hairyplane o’ mine’s worth thousands, and I wouldn’t have it damaged on any account. Hang on tight; the insurance company pays big salvage for a job like this.’

"‘H-how much?’ says Bedlow, gaspin’ an’ pullin’.

"‘Seven an’ three-quarters per cent,’ says Mr. Walker. ‘You can work it all out while you’re pullin’. There’s eight of you. Divide seven an’ three-quarters by eight, an’ that’ll give you each man’s percentage. Steady on! Keep pullin’, an’ don’t slide into the ditch. You’re doin’ splendid. I don’t wonder you won the tug-o’-war to-day. I’d like to have a team o’ chaps like you pullin’ for me always.’

"‘That was past one in the mornin’ when they came out, an’ Mr. Walker kep’ on encouragin’ ’em an’ workin’ out percentages till it was very near two and they was half dead. Then he said :

"‘Keep steady, and I’ll go and see how she’s gettin’ on. P’r’aps me an’ my man can hang the sky-hooks on the safety-valve an’ give you a bit of a rest. But don’t stop pullin’ till I tell you.’

"‘He called out to Jones an’ went off to meet him. Bedlow and the other chaps hung on somehow an’ waited, but they heard no more of him. After a bit Bedlow sings out :

"‘Mr. Walker! Mr. Walker!’

"‘Not a word of answer did they get, but presently the voice of Sam Gill from the other side o’ the field callin’ out most pathetic :

"‘Mr. Walker! We can’t stick this here much longer!’

And Bedlow cries out again :

"‘Mr. Walker! Flesh an’ blood can’t stand this no more. Is them sky-hooks hung on the safety-valve? Can’t we take a rest?’

"‘Then they heard Sam Gill again complainin’ most mollen-colly in the distance, an’ presently says Bill Wood behind Bedlow :

" 'This here hairyplane's easing up. It don't pull half as hard as it did.'

"And once more they heard Sam Gill across the field :

" 'D'ye hear, Mr. Walker? We're a-goin' to let go !'

"With that the rope went all slack, an' they stood up and shouted across the hedge to Sam Gill. It was must beginning to get a little grey in the sky, and things wasn't so pitch dark.

" 'I can't see no hairyplane,' says Bill Wood.

" 'I can't see nothin' at all,' says Bedlow.

"An' they couldn't. 'Cause why? There was nothin' there. There was no hairyplane, an' no Mr. Walker, an' no Jones. Nothing but a precious long rope with half o' the Padfield tug-o'-war team at each end of it !

"They got over the hedge an' met in the middle o' the field, and then they all got a presentiment at once.

" 'Them Codham chaps !' says some on 'em, an 'That side o' bacon !' says all eight. And with that they runned headlong. But they were too late. There was the gas still a-burnin' an' the winder an' the door open, but the side o' bacon were gone, an' nobody in Padfield ever see it again. And it was only when he went to draw some water in the mornin' that Bedlow found out that that there precious long rope they'd all a-been pullin' on was the rope out of his own well.

"There's been more'n one fight since then when Codham chaps ha' called out : 'Mr. Walker ! Can't we have a rest ?' on market-days or what not. An' there was one in the bar o' this very house when Jim Bartrip, the big chap as slipped in the Codham team, came in an' told Huxon that if he didn't know how to divide a side o' bacon into eight fair parts he could teach him, havin' seen that done quite lately.

" 'How ?' asks Huxon, very disputatious.

" 'Cut it all up in rashers an' weigh 'em out, you silly chump,' says Jim Bartrip."

And Dan'l Robgent turned to his pot once more, with a long grumble wherein only the word "impidence" was clearly distinguishable.

THE FIRE AT THE COLONEL'S



T. O. BEACHCROFT

T. O. BEACHCROFT tried to be funny
In order to make some money
But he never found there was much in fun
Until he got taken by Hutchinson.

THE FIRE AT THE COLONEL'S

“WELL, Goulder, mustn't stand here talking all day. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.”

Colonel Aintree was concluding a heavy order with Arthur Goulder, proprietor of the grocer's shop, principal bass in the choir, and one of the substantial citizens of Edgerly. On his way out another idea seemed to strike the colonel.

“By the way, Goulder,” he said, turning back. “They tell me you're captain of the fire-brigade: I wish you'd let me come along and see one of your drills. I'm just interested, you know.”

Goulder looked rather blank and nodded: by the time he had recollected that he really was captain of the fire-brigade, the colonel was off again.

“D'you find the men pretty enthusiastic?” he said. “Let's see, who have you got? There's old Ted Lorimer, isn't there, and his boys?”

“Yes, that's right,” said Goulder. “There's the Lorimers, and the two Gomshalls, and Mr. Franklin from the Lower Farm, and my young nephew Percy, and—well, I'll get the list and show you, sir, some time. Oh, yes, they're enthusiastic enough. I wouldn't say they weren't that. I've no complaints to make there: it's the time like that's the difficulty round here.”

“Oh, yes, I can quite see that,” said the colonel, “busy men: busy men: I know. That's just what was in my mind. I was just thinking as I was such an idle fellow these days I ought to do something to lend a hand. Can't stand being idle, you know, Goulder. Feel I've got to put my shoulder to the wheel somewhere. Now you're busy. I'm at your service. What do you say, Goulder? What do you say about it?”

“Well, sir,” said Goulder doubtfully, “we'd be much

obliged, sir, of course. I know I can say that on behalf of us all. But I don't really know that I quite get. . . ."

"Very good then, Goulder," said the colonel. "Excellent. I shall be only too glad. Now when's your next drill? No need for me to waste time. When's the very next one fixed? Saturday? Wednesday evening?"

"Well," said Goulder, looking up and down the road as if he were hoping for someone to consult, "I don't rightly know when we can fix one up. Not just this very week or so. You see, it's the time that's so difficult nowadays. Since the War everybody's had their bit of allotment—and then there's that picture-house opened in Edgeminster, and a regular bus service every evening—and the cricket club too, and one thing and another. There's Ted Lorimer has just bought an old Morris, and he and his two lads were messing about with it all last Saturday evening. We were to have had a meeting then, but I didn't want to disoblige them, especially as Ted's been a member since before I was captain."

"Well, how about next Saturday?"

"That ain't much good. There's them sports: you fixed that up yourself, sir."

"Yes, sports, of course. Well, a weekday evening, then."

"I don't like to suggest it, sir, really I don't, not now we're right on to haymaking, and the weather likely to break. But there, to tell you the truth, sir, I don't really worry 'em too much about these practices. They all know what's wanted when the time arrives. I don't think there's any real need for it, just at present."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the colonel, "perhaps you're right: you know best, Goulder. And you're quite certain they're really keen, are you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Still, I think you ought to get some way of getting them together from time to time. New methods to be learnt, aren't there?"

"Oh, well, we meet from time to time," said Goulder, "to talk things out a bit. You can be sure of that, sir. There's the committee, and the annual dinner down at the 'Edgerly Arms.'"

"Excellent," said the colonel. "Excellent. Well, I must

be off. My wife's got a lunch party or something. Good day, Goulder, good day."

It was noon on a hot August day. The village seemed asleep; the only thing moving was a fat old spaniel who waddled panting from the sunlight into the shade. The road was white and dusty. The long grasses and weeds in the unkempt ditch were dusty too, and the whole village seemed to give out exhalations of drowsy heat. Colonel Aintree received the impression that Edgerly was wrapped in the slumber, not of a hot day, but of centuries.

After the colonel had entertained his lunch guests, had strolled with them across his perfect lawn, had lingered over the new hard tennis court, the roses, the pig-sties, and most important of all, the horses, and had finally waved them away up the road, he sat down in his summer-house: not to sleep, as many men would have done, but to light a cigar and to engage, wrapped in its fragrant clouds, in active thought.

The colonel was an active man. He liked others to be active too. He did not believe that any man's talents were given to rust in him unused. He liked people to come out and do things in public for the greater glory of the community that produced them—whether this was a battalion of soldiers, or merely the village of Edgerly.

If a neighbour dabbled knowledgeably in rose trees, the colonel would coerce him into exhibiting at the Edgerly Flower Show. If someone had formed the habit of dropping into the old vicar's for a weekly tittle-tattle and glass of port under the notion of playing chess, he would be hailed jovially by the colonel as Capablanca: cuttings of chess problems from Sunday papers would be ceremoniously kept for him: and sooner or later, unless he left the district, he would find himself involved in a local chess tournament. In this way the colonel called upon one and all to give an account of their stewardship.

It was only a few months since the colonel had returned home after years of service. He had already breathed new life into the cricket club, equipped it with a club cup, a fixture list, had even collected subscriptions. He had sent magazines coursing with unknown speed round the magazine club. He had whipped up the dart-playing at the "Edgerly Arms" with an American tournament. Now he was saying to himself in the summer-house: "What about this fire-brigade?

What are these fellows up to? What are they at? What can I do about it?"

For a few days the colonel did nothing and said nothing about the fire-brigade to Goulder or to anyone. Goulder hoped he had handled the colonel firmly but tactfully, and managed to steer him off the whole idea. But the colonel went on smoking cigars in his summer-house.

Some evenings later he passed Goulder in the village. It was Friday, and Goulder was coming away from choir practice.

The colonel's weather-beaten Sunbeam tourer came stealthily up from behind and stopped alongside of him.

"Good evening, Goulder," said the colonel. "Good evening."

"Good evening, sir," said Goulder.

"Well," said the colonel, "new anthem going on well, I hope?"

"Oh, it's well enough, sir," said Goulder. "If only them boys weren't so frightened of coming in on their leads: that's always the trouble in a smallish choir. Once they get the treble part going they can do it pretty nice. I don't know what it is quite. They seem to be frightened at starting."

"Well, you must keep 'em at it, eh? Rub it into them well," said the colonel, feeling slightly out of his depth.

"Mind you," said Goulder, "I don't say that it's an easy anthem to sing. It's not. I don't think anyone would allow that."

"Still," said the colonel, "it's the hard things that are worth doing. Well, I must move off. Got to take one of the horses up to the vet. in half an hour. Good evening, Goulder. Good evening."

He began to move away.

"Oh, by the by," he suddenly said, stopping again. "Wait a minute. I've been doing some thinking, Goulder. About the fire-brigade. I've been putting in what you might call a little staff work. Got an idea going: just an idea."

Goulder nodded and began to look uneasily towards his own cottage.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"It's a very good thing for a place like this to have a fire-brigade of its own," said the colonel. "I was very

pleased to find there was one. 'Specially as you're all experienced people. That's pretty good for Edgerly, in my opinion. But I think you people ought to have a bit of chance to show us all your paces. It's dull work having nothing very much to do—and nothing but practices."

Goulder smiled uneasily. Did the colonel know they hadn't had a practice for three years?

"Well," said the colonel, "I agree with what you were saying the other night. We'll cut the practice out for a bit: go easy on the routine work, so to speak."

Goulder assented.

"Very good," said the colonel. "Very good indeed. But I've got a better idea still. I want all you chaps to have a treat—something to show off on." The colonel chuckled, and his bright blue eyes twinkled at Goulder. "Now what I mean is this, Goulder. What about a little fire? Eh? What about a fire? Just something to show off on? What d'you think about it, Goulder? What d'you think?"

"Well," said Goulder, "I don't just quite follow your meaning at the minute, sir. Fires are serious things. You can't go playing about with fires. I don't quite see how you could go making a fire, sir. Suppose we couldn't get it under. Supposing it went wrong. Why there's arson to think of: it might come under wilful arson."

"I think we can get round that all right," said the colonel.

"You'll excuse my saying so, sir, but if you'd had the experience with fires as I've had, you wouldn't suggest such a thing. Once you've seen a blaze up properly going, and been near the thing, you don't think fire a thing to go playing about with. The burnt child shuns playing with the fire, sir, as they say. And the fireman shuns it too. He knows too much about it."

"You're quite right, Goulder," said the colonel, "quite right. Quite right. But I never meant to carry it to such lengths. And anyhow, it would only be my own property."

"You mean really, sir, you could *pretend* something was on fire?"

The colonel nodded.

"Well, sir," said Goulder, "just as you like: but still, I don't really see what good it would do."

"Of course it will do good," said the colonel. "Of course it will do good. And you'll enjoy it. So will the

men. That's the idea. It'll add keenness and spirit to the whole thing, and everybody will talk about it for weeks afterwards. All you've got to do is to give me your co-operation. Mind you, I'm not going to ask for anything difficult."

Goulder waited.

"To-morrow," said the colonel, "is Saturday. And it's the day of the cricket match against Edgecombe, isn't it? Are we going to win?"

"I think we ought to," said Goulder.

"That's excellent. Well, the idea is this. You'll have everybody down on the cricket field, and probably all the members of the fire-brigade will be there too, either playing or watching. What?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, in the course of the afternoon I shall ring up the post office from my house and get them to send a message to say I've got a fire on at my home. How's that?"

"I don't really see that such lengths of actions is really actually called for," said Goulder.

"All you have to do," said the colonel, "is to turn out in your smartest style and bring the fire-engine along. You'll have half the village already collected simply to see how well you do it. Then comes my little bit. When you've got your hoses out and a good stream of water playing, I shall come forward and congratulate you in public. Shan't let on it's all arranged between us, of course. Then I shall take the occasion to talk about the need for new equipment and anything else you want : and how much a well-run fire-brigade means, and all the rest of it. Get the idea, Goulder? You'll have a fresh interest and enthusiasm all over the place : more recruits if you want them : a live fund for purchases—and we can buck the whole thing up no end. Good idea, isn't it, Goulder? Don't you think so?"

Goulder smiled a rather sickly smile.

"Sounds interesting, sir," he said. "But there's one or two points. For instance, is the message to say your house is on fire? Because it seems to me it would be too easy for anyone to see as that wasn't really so. You don't want to have it afire really?"

"No. No. No. Not at all," said the colonel. "Of course not."

"Well, if I might suggest, sir," said Goulder, "let's make it the stables. That'll seem more likely, sir, if you know what I mean. They can't be seen from the road. Stables catches fire easy, as I've often had experience of: all the straw and wooden partitions. If you take my advice, sir, I think we should make it the stables."

"Right," said the colonel. "Quite right, Goulder. A sound notion. We'll make it the stables. But doesn't that mean it will be all the more difficult for you. You'll have to come round by the little lane behind the church and then in at my yard gate. The lane's fearfully bad. Can you manage it?"

"That's all right," said Goulder. "If it's difficult, there's all the more reason for us doing it: as you said yourself just now."

"Excellent," said the colonel. "That's the idea, Goulder, since you feel like that about it. Well, I must just get along to the 'Edgerly Arms' and see old Lorimer about a large cask of beer to wind up the proceedings with. Good night. Good night."

He let in his clutch and sped away.

In suggesting the stables, Goulder had not been in the least interested in the points that he had mentioned to the colonel. He knew one thing which the colonel did not know. There was a hydrant just outside the colonel's stable yard. The location of the stables would thus make his task, not as he had suggested, more difficult, but very much more easy. This thought gave him comfort. With that hydrant so close, he thought, they really might make a good, smart, speedy job of it, and get a good stream of water going rapidly. That was what would impress the colonel, as it impressed all amateurs: if only nothing went wrong. Goulder sighed.

Later in the evening he felt impelled to drop down to the "Edgerly Arms" and have a talk with the owner, Ted Lorimer, his lifelong friend and chief henchman in the fire-brigade. But he could derive no real comfort from Ted. Ted didn't really grasp the point at issue.

"Why, don't worry about it, Arthur," he said. "Whatever be the matter, boy? I think the colonel's idea's a good 'un: specially as I've just sold him a whole hogshead of old and mild on the strength of it. The colonel's a lad,

ain't he? But he knows what he's at, and this is going to set everything to rights."

"Ah," said Goulder. "I dare say you're right."

But he knew well enough what the colonel's true aim and object was. The activities of the fire-brigade had long since become nominal. Even the engine was an antiquated horse-drawn vehicle. Of late years they had come to rely for practical purposes on the smart brigade from Edgeminster. But the colonel did not approve of anybody's activities being nominal: least of all those of fire-brigades. And Goulder knew well enough that the fire-brigade was being cajoled into a public display of awful ignorance. The colonel obviously intended that this should deliver the whole thing up into his own hands, and Goulder would be politely edged from his captaincy. Goulder sighed, and homeward plodded his weary way.

In the course of the following afternoon, while the cricket match was proceeding, Goulder uneasily broached to most of his command the subject of possible fires. There hadn't been a fire for years, he pointed out. There might be a fire almost any day now. Did they feel fully confident about their jobs? But they all did.

"Why, good Lord, Arthur," said Ted Lorimer, "it's all right. We've been in the fire-brigade, some of us, man and boy twenty-five years now, and seen some fires, too. At least, some of us have. Besides, we aren't fools, are we? Look at that old Morris I bought—me and my boys got that going fine. If a man can fix a car, it shows he won't have much trouble with a fire-engine. Oh, well *hit*, Henry! See that, Arthur? That'll teach 'em to bowl leg theory."

Lorimer clapped vigorously as his younger son banged blindly at a wide half-volley and by good luck clouted it over square-leg's head.

As the afternoon passed by, Goulder began to hope against hope that the colonel was going to put the occasion off: but sure enough at five o'clock, as excitement in the cricket began to die down, a boy was seen running across the field.

"Mr. Goulder, Mr. Goulder," he shouted shrilly, "there's a telephone message just come from Colonel Aintree: his stables is afire. Where's Mr. Goulder? Burning terrible, the colonel said."

In a moment Goulder and everyone else had the news.

"Collect everybody," Goulder instructed Ted from the midst of an excited throng, "and join me at the fire-station."

Goulder then seized and mounted a bicycle that someone thrust into his hands, and pedalled furiously towards the village. He had never felt such misgivings on the few occasions he had received calls to genuine fires. The fire-station consisted of one shed adjoining the "Edgerly Arms," in which the engine was housed. Towards this Goulder hastened, with the crowd streaming out behind him. Now the "Edgerly Arms" was about a quarter of a mile from the cricket field, and Colonel Aintree's house was a mile from the "Edgerly Arms." The colonel stood at the drive gate, watch in hand. He reckoned thus. Five minutes was a generous allowance from the cricket field to the fire-station, allowing time to collect everyone. Five minutes, then, from the time of hanging up his receiver, he regarded at zero hour. He had read that a well-conducted fire-brigade takes about three minutes to get away after receiving an alarm: in fact he had seen it done.

He thought this rather too much to expect of Edgerly, so he decided to double the allowance and call it six. Ten minutes seemed a very comfortable allowance to bring the fire-engine along to his house. He therefore reckoned that he would regard as first-class an appearance in round about fifteen or sixteen minutes from zero hour: after twenty minutes, it would be second-class: after that, only fair: after half an hour, pretty bad.

The hose would begin to play, he presumed, almost simultaneously with the arrival of the engine. So there he stood ready, watch in hand. At zero hour, Goulder actually did stand at the door of the fire-station, awaiting his men. In the course of five minutes eight of them, out of eleven, assembled, and a great many other people too. Ted Lorimer and his two sons, almost alone among the inhabitants of Edgerly, were absent. For some two minutes Goulder and his eight stood irresolute. Then Willie Lorimer arrived.

"Dad's a-starting up the old car," he said. "He reckoned that 'ud be quicker: he's bringing Henry with him."

The crowd waited. At about ten minutes after zero hour Ted Lorimer and his offspring arrived amidst much

blue smoke and deafening explosions from their car. The crowd gave vent to their relief in a subdued murmur of excitement, mounting almost to a cheer. All would now be well; the colonel's stables would be saved.

"All ready?" said Goulder. "Now for it!"

Goulder advanced to the door of the shed. After all, they were reliable chaps, splendid chaps; no reason at all why they should not acquit themselves with credit. Especially with a hydrant on the spot; that was a tremendous comfort to him, and he congratulated himself on his little bit of cleverness in arranging things so well. Then he found that the door of the fire-station was locked. It was now most unusual that it should be locked, but it was so now. The key was in the top left-hand drawer of the bureau in his front room.

Fortunately, distances are short in Edgerly. By the time Willie Lorimer had extracted one terrific report from the motor-car, a runner arrived with the key. The time allowed for a first-class according to the colonel's system was now over.

"All ready," said Goulder once again. "Come on."

Goulder swung the door open; the inside of the fire-station was exposed to the public eye. As a matter of fact, it was perfectly familiar to them all; only during the last three years everybody had forgotten that it was the fire-station. It had degenerated because it was conveniently situated for that purpose, into a kind of communal dumping ground for baskets on market day. Everybody slung their empties in there, and there they were, ready for use when wanted. Thus a gradual accumulation of old baskets had gone on in the fire-station for three years or more. They didn't belong to anyone in particular; people just took them as needed and shied them back again. There must have been two hundred or more piled from floor to ceiling. Behind them, and underneath them, the red paint of the antique engine gleamed faintly.

However, baskets are easy to lift, and helpers were plentiful. A perfect hail of baskets began to shoot from the doorway, and in very little more than three minutes the fire-engine was reached: in another three it was completely disentangled (eighteen minutes past zero hour). Uniforms and helmets hanging on the wall were quickly donned.

Meanwhile, Goulder and Ted Lorimer had been in anxious consultation with Percy Bond concerning Brown Bess. Brown Bess, the official motive power of the fire-engine, and the property of Percy, was always kept at the inn stables, so as to be ready for an emergency.

In her unofficial moments she had been accustomed to draw the Bond wagonette and spring cart. But this particular summer, what with purchase of a Ford van and the failing faculties of Bess, Percy had put her out to grass. She was now on the hillside two miles away.

As soon as this was made known, the resources of Edgerly were placed at the captain's disposal: and within another five minutes a couple of men had been detailed to harness and fetch the nearest horse.

"Come on, Ted," said Goulder, "while the horse is coming, we'll have her out on the road by hand." Groans and shouts issued.

"Errup! Heeeev-o! That's got her! *And* again! Heeeev-o! Right!" With creaks of protest the engine moved forward.

"*That's* got her! Steady now! Ease up a bit. Easy! Steady on! *Steady!* HI!"

The ground from the shed to the roadway was a pretty steep slope; only some six yards, but quite enough for even a small and out-of-date fire-engine to get out of hand. It appeared to become possessed of an evil spirit, and, tearing itself from everybody's grasp, plunged down the bank. On striking the upward camber of the road the front wheels and shafts swung round sideways. There was a crash, a grinding noise and a sharp crack. One corner of the engine gently kissed the earth. The near fore wheel had broken to smithereens. The front axle was obviously very unwell.

At this moment a fine shire chestnut, ready harnessed, was led up at a clattering trot. (Twenty-seven minutes after zero hour.)

"I don't know," said Goulder, surveying the wreck. "Best send a message up to say we can't get there."

"'Can't' be blasted," said Ted Lorimer. "We're a-going to get there. I ain't going to let the colonel's stables burn down."

Ten minutes discussion followed, in which the members of the fire-brigade and all the village took part. Meanwhile

eye-witnesses began to arrive from the colonel's house with the news that the colonel seemed to have got the fire well in hand unaided, and that they didn't rightly see that there was any real call for the fire-engine. These, however, were countered by a second phone call from the colonel to the inn to say that he was anxiously awaiting the fire-engine's arrival.

Gradually the truth began to dawn upon the village. In a spirit of genial ribaldry they joined in the discussion, suggesting many means of transporting the fire-engine to the colonel's front door.

"Hey, Arthur, what about my wheelbarrer?"

"Put it in the post, I should."

"I'll make yer a new wheel on Monday, Arthur, only tell the colonel to keep his fire going!"

"I don't care a damn," shouted Ted Lorimer, "the colonel asked for the blasted fire-engine, and I blasted-well ain't going to bed till he gets it! So tell him to put that in his stables and burn it!"

"Quite right, Mr. Lorimer. You let him have it. Don't let the colonel play with you!"

"Come on, Arthur," said Lorimer. "What do you say?"

"I don't know," answered Goulder. "I really don't know at all!"

He sighed heavily: his worst fears were being fulfilled.

It being by now six o'clock (and fifty minutes past zero hour), the fire-brigade, and with them other public-spirited helpers, drifted into the bar of the inn, where they set themselves, with the aid of drink, to solve the problem. Gusts of argument arose.

To get the fire-engine moving on its own wheels before Monday was evidently impracticable. The notion of crowding sufficient men underneath it to lift it bodily and carry it shoulder high down the road seemed feasible, and was only put out of court by actual test—one hour and fifteen minutes having by then slipped away. To fix up the broken wheel with a skid and harness a couple of good farmhorses appeared possible: but the bent axle had also jammed the other front wheel, and two skids on the gritty road were out of the question. Half an hour elapsed while this scheme was being tried out.

At last Mr. Franklin of the Lower Farm had an idea.

Only that week he had hired a lorry to move some bricks on his land. If the fire-engine could be placed on the lorry, all would be well. It certainly seemed worth trying. So the lorry was fetched.

By this time the original issue of the whole business—which was a supposed fire at the colonel's—had been entirely merged in the new consideration, of taking the fire-engine to the colonel's house somehow. No matter whether the fire had gone out or burnt out, or if there had never been a fire, the point was to show the colonel that the Edgerly fire-brigade was capable of overcoming all difficulties.

Ropes and big baulks of timber were fetched, and in half an hour the fire-engine was lifted bodily from its under-carriage and hoisted on board the lorry.

At two hours and three-quarters past zero hour, the lorry, with the fire-engine perched on its back and the fire-brigade on top of this, roared away from the fire-station, with the crowd trailing out behind it, and ten minutes later—banged itself to a standstill at the end of the colonel's drive.

The colonel, who had been keeping himself informed of the progress of affairs, was waiting—watch in hand.

"Well—here we are, sir," said Goulder, sheepishly, rather wondering what was supposed to happen next, and feeling very bitterly towards the colonel.

"Two hours and three-quarters," bellowed the colonel genially. "Two hours and three-quarters!"

"Well, sir, we had a little difficulty," said Goulder crossly. In fact. . . ."

"Never mind. Never mind *that*. Get on with it, now. Stables burning furiously. Get out your hose, quick!"

"Very good, sir. Very good. Here, Ted, jump to it."

"Right," said Ted, and in about ten minutes the fire hose was uncoiled, the hand pump was manned, the worst kinks smoothed out, and the nozzle pointed at the colonel's stables.

An unfortunate thing now happened.

"Ready now, Captain," said the colonel, still keeping up his joke, "must save those horses."

Goulder scratched his head.

"Well, I don't know," he said, "really I don't know."

"What's up?" shouted Ted.

"Get a move on," roared the colonel, "what's the hitch now?"

"I don't know," said Goulder, mournfully, "there always was a hydrant here."

"Course there was," said Ted.

"Well, it's gone!"

"Someone must 'a been and stole it in the night," suggested a voice from the crowd. Loud laughter arose. Even the colonel's eyes twinkled.

"Tell you wot it is," said Willie Lorimer. "Those road-makers. That road were up last year. They damned fools have covered the hydrant up!"

Goulder shook his head and muttered under his breath. The very worst had happened. He only wanted to go home, to lock himself in, and never to hear the words "fire-brigade" mentioned in public for the rest of his life. He looked at the colonel, made a hopeless grimace, and shrugged his shoulders. The field was lost as far as he was concerned.

"Come along in, all you fellows," said the colonel, "come in. Come into the loose-box, and I'll show you a better hydrant than that ever was."

They followed him into the stables.

"There you are," said the colonel. "How about that for a hydrant? How about it? Do you know how to set about that?"

The colonel pointed to a huge cask of beer supported high on trestles in the loose-box. Round it were many jugs and tankards. They all began to help themselves. The colonel liked to do things lavishly.

After the first pints had gone round, the colonel stepped on to a packing-case in one corner and held up his hand for quiet. Goulder, well at the back, began to eye his boots and wonder if he could slip away.

"First of all," said the colonel, in loud tones, shouting down the last whispers, "I want to thank all you men very much. I want especially to thank——"

"Look out, sir. Look out!" cried a voice suddenly. "What's that? Look here!"

Suddenly smoke began to issue from the straw which covered the floor of the loose-box. In two minutes it had crackled up in half a dozen places: some wooden boxes had caught fire: some garden sticks, then the actual partition of the next stall.

"Good God," said the colonel.

Now his stables really were on fire.

The colonel leapt down from his box, pushed his way through the crowd, and began to shout in the stable yard for his groom and gardener.

"Here, Perkins!" he said, "run like hell. Come and help me get those horses out."

Old soldier that the colonel was, he didn't like the idea of stables on fire. He could hear the flames crackling inside. He had awful visions of his horses refusing to be led out and perishing in the flames. Momentarily he turned pale.

"What are we going to do?" he said to Goulder. "That damned hydrant: I've got no water except tap water. Here, all you men," he said, "go into the house. Get all the rugs, pieces of matting, anything you like, to stifle the flames."

"It's quite all right, sir," said Goulder. "Excuse me pushing you, sir: just leave it to me. Now everyone clear out. I want everyone outside the stables at once. Come on, now."

The colonel stepped aside, flipping his fingers impatiently. At that moment Ted Lorimer appeared. He had run back to the fire-engine and fetched two heavy fireman's axes. He handed one to Goulder and with the other one pushed everyone aside, went into the stables and slammed the door.

In a few seconds a terrific noise of smashing was heard; followed by a hissing. Instantly volumes of smoke poured out of every crevice. Everyone stood silent. In a few minutes Goulder and Lorimer flung the doors open and staggered out, choking.

They had smashed the hogshead of beer to smithereens with their axes; from its elevation on the trestles fifty or more gallons of old and mild had shot all over the loose box. Every runnel and crack of the floor was filled with beer. Every twist of straw and hay was soaked in an instant. The blazing boxes were quickly covered with the sodden stuff and stifled: the burning partition was swilled with beer from a bucket and smothered in the wet straw. With a few well-directed strokes of their axes Lorimer and Goulder had saved the whole situation.

"I should just get them horses out away from the smoke if I was you, sir," Goulder instructed the colonel.

Half an hour later, the crowd had gone, but Goulder and Lorimer stood in the colonel's dining-room, sipping a glass of his special sherry at the sideboard.

"Well," said the colonel, "here's luck to you. I must say, Goulder, if you'll forgive my saying so—the first part of the evening was—well, not so good. But still, that's all made up for now. I'm grateful—grateful."

"Aha," said Lorimer, drinking his sherry with relish. "Leg-pulling, if you'll excuse my saying so, is a game as two can play at. Give us a mock fire, and a mock call, and you'll see maybe we can be a bit funny, and I hope you'll forgive us for that, sir—though perhaps we shouldn't have done it."

The colonel looked a little blank.

"But give us a real fire, however sudden or unexpected it comes," said Goulder, "and I believe we'd find the quickest way to deal with it. I hope we showed you that."

"Yes, yes," said the colonel. "Certainly."

"There's just one thing as I'd like to add, sir," Lorimer said. "Next week is the annual meeting of the fire-brigade: down at the 'Arms,' sir. I want to take the occasion to propose a special vote of confidence in Arthur's captaincy. And after what's happened, sir, I suppose I can rely on you, sir, to second it."

"What?" said the colonel. "What's that? Er—oh, yes, Lorimer, certainly, certainly. I'll be only too happy. Quite. Yes."

Lorimer thoughtfully fingered in his pocket the box of matches with which he had deliberately fired the straw after a whispered word to Goulder.

THE GHOUL OF GOLDER'S GREEN



MICHAEL ARLEN

MICHAEL ARLEN was born in a village on the Danube, but when he was five years old his parents moved to England and he decided to accompany them. His first book, *The London Venture*, written at eighteen, was a book of confessions, and since then he has charmed London with *The Green Hat*, *Lily Christine* and *Hell! said the Duchess*.

THE GHOUL OF GOLDER'S GREEN

I

IT is fortunate that the affair should have happened to Mr. Ralph Wyndham Trevor and be told by him, for Mr. Trevor is a scholar of some authority. It is in a spirit of almost ominous premonition that he begins the tale, telling how he was walking slowly up Davies Street one night when he caught a crab. It need scarcely be said that Davies Street owes its name to that Mary Davies, the heiress, who married into the noble house of Grosvenor. That was years and years ago, of course, and is of no importance whatsoever now, but it may be of interest to students.

It was very late on a winter's night, and Mr. Trevor was depressed, for he had that evening lost a great deal more than he could afford at the card-game of auction-bridge. Davies Street was deserted; and the moon and Mr. Trevor walked alone towards Berkeley Square. It was not the sort of moon that Mr. Trevor remembered having seen before. It was, indeed, the sort of moon one usually meets only in books or wine. Mr. Trevor was sober.

Nothing happened, Mr. Trevor affirms, for quite a while; he just walked, and, at that corner where Davies Street and Mount Street join together the better to become Berkeley Square, stayed his walking, with the idea that he would soothe his depression with the fumes of a cigarette. His cigarette-case, however, was empty. All London, says Mr. Trevor, appeared to be empty that night. Berkeley Square lay pallid and desolate: looking clear, not as though with moonlight, but with dead daylight; and never a voice to put life into the still streets, never a breeze to play with the bits of paper in the gutters or to sing among the dry boughs of the trees. Berkeley Square looked like nothing so much as an old stage-property that no one had any use for. Mr.

Trevor had no use at all for it; and became definitely antagonistic to it when a taxi-cab crawled wretchedly across the waste white expanse, and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, looked into his face with a beseeching look.

"Taxi, sir?" he said.

Mr. Trevor says that, not wanting to hurt the man's feelings, he just looked another way.

"Nice night, sir," said the driver miserably, "for a drive in an 'ackney-carriage."

"I live," said Mr. Trevor with restraint, "only a few doors off. So hackney-carriage to you."

"No luck!" sighed the driver, and accelerated madly away even as Mr. Trevor changed his mind, for would it not be an idea to drive to the nearest coffee-stall and buy some cigarettes? This, however, he was not to do, for there was no other reply to his repeated calls of "Taxi!" but certain heavy blows on the silence of Davies Street behind him.

"Wanting a taxi, sir?" said a voice which could only belong to a policeman.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Trevor bitterly. "I never want a taxi. But now and then a taxi-driver thrusts himself on me and pays me to be seen in his cab, just to give it a tone. Next question."

"Ho!" said the policeman thoughtfully.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Trevor.

"Ho!" said the policeman thoughtfully.

"The extent of your vocabulary," said Mr. Trevor gloomily, "leads me to conclude that you must have been born a gentleman. Have you, in that case, a cigarette you could spare?"

"Gaspers," said the policeman.

"Thank you," said Mr. Trevor, rejecting them. "I am no stranger to ptomaine-poisoning."

"That's funny," said the policeman, "your saying that. I was just thinking of death."

"Death?" said Mr. Trevor.

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"I've said what?" said Mr. Trevor.

"Death," said the policeman.

"Oh, death!" said Mr. Trevor. "I always say 'death,' constable. It's my favourite word."

"Ghoulish, I calls it, sir. Ghoulish, no less."

"That entirely depends," said Mr. Trevor, "on what you are talking about. In some things, ghoulish is as ghoulish does. In others, no."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But ghoulish goes, in this 'ere affair. One after the other lying in their own blood, and not a sign as to who's done it, not a sign!"

"Oh, come, constable! Tut-tut! Not even a thumb-mark in the blood?"

"I'm telling you," said the policeman severely. "Corpses slit to ribbons all the way from 'Ampstead 'Eath to this 'ere Burkley Square. And why? That's what I asks myself. And why?"

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor gaily, "there certainly have been a lot of murders lately. Ha-ha! But not, surely, as many as all that!"

"I'm coming to that," said the policeman severely. "We don't allow of the Press reporting more'n a quarter of them. No, sir. That's wot it 'as come to, these larst few days. A more painful situation 'as rarely arisen in the hannals of British crime. The un'eard-of bestiality of the criminal may well baffle ordinary minds like yours and mine."

"I don't believe a word of it!" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"Ho, *you* don't!" said the policeman. "*You* don't!"

"That's right," said Mr. Trevor, "I don't. Do you mean to stand there and tell me that I wouldn't 'ave 'eard—I mean, have heard of this criminal if he had really existed?"

"You're a gent," said the policeman.

"You've said it," said Mr. Trevor.

"And gents," said the policeman, "know nothing. And what they do know is mouldy. Ever 'eard of Jack the Ripper?"

"Yes, I 'ave," said Mr. Trevor bitterly.

"Have is right, sir, if you'll excuse me. Well, Jack's death was never rightly proved, not it! So it might well be 'im at 'is old tricks again, even though 'e has been retired, in a manner of speaking, these forty years. Remorseless and hindiscriminate murder, swift and sure, was Jack's line, if you remember, sir."

"Before my time," said Mr. Trevor gloomily.

"Well, Jack's method was just to slit 'em up with a razor, f rontwise and from south to north, and not a blessed word

spoken. No one's touched 'im yet, not for efficiency, but this new chap, 'e looks like catching Jack up. *And* at Jack's own game, razor and all. Makes a man fair sick, sir, to see the completed work. Just slits 'em up as clean as you or me might slit up a vealanam-pie. We was laying bets on 'im over at Vine Street only to-night, curious like to see whether 'e'd beat Jack's record. But it'll take some beating, I give you my word. Up to date this chap 'as only done in twelve in three weeks—not that that's 'alf bad, seeing as how 'e's new to the game, more or less."

"Oh rather, more or less!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Twelve! Good God—only twelve! But why—why don't you catch the ghastly man?"

"Ho, why don't we!" said the policeman. "Becos we don't know 'ow, that's why. Not us! It's the little one-corpse men we're good for, not these 'ere big artists. Look at Jack the Ripper—did we catch 'im? Did we? And look at Julian Raphael—did we catch 'im? I'm asking you."

"I know you are," said Mr. Trevor gratefully. "Thank you."

"I don't want your thanks," said the policeman. "I'm just warning you."

Mr. Trevor gasped: "Warning *me*!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "You don't ought to be out alone at this time of night, an 'earty young chap like you. These twelve 'e's already done in were all 'earty young chaps. 'E's partial to 'em 'earty, I do believe. And social gents some of 'em was, too, with top-'ats to hand, just like you might be now, sir, coming 'ome from a smoking-concert. Jack the Ripper all over again, that's wot I say. Except that this 'ere new corpse-fancier, 'e don't seem to fancy women at all."

"A chaps' murderer, what!" said Mr. Trevor faintly. "Ha-ha! What!"

"You've said it," said the policeman. "But you never know your luck, sir. And maybe as 'ow thirteen's your lucky number."

Mr. Trevor lays emphasis on the fact that throughout he treated the constable with the courtesy due from a gentleman to the law. He merely said: "Constable, I am now going home. I do not like you very much. You are an alarmist.

And I hope that when you go to sleep to-night your ears swell so that when you wake up in the morning you will be able to fly straight to Heaven and never be seen or heard of again. You and your razors and your thirteens !”

“Ho, they ain’t mine, far from it !” said the policeman, and even as he spoke a voice crashed upon the silence from the direction of Mount Street. The voice belonged to a tall figure in black and white, and on his head was a top-hat that shone under the pallid moon like a monstrous black jewel.

“That there,” said the policeman, “is a Noise.”

“He’s singing,” said Mr. Trevor.

“I’ll teach ’im singing !” said the policeman.

Sang the voice :—

“With an host of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear
And a horse of air
To the wilderness I wander.”

“You will,” said the policeman. “Oh, you will !”

“By a knight of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond
The wide world’s end—
Methinks it is no journey !”

“Not to Vine Street, it isn’t,” said the policeman.

“Ho there !” cried the approaching voice. “Who dares interrupt my song !”

“Beau Maturin !” cried Mr. Trevor gladly. “It’s not you ! Bravo, Beau Maturin ! Sing, bless you, sing ! For I am depressed.”

“From Heaven’s Gate to Hampstead Heath
Young Bacchus and his crew
Came tumbling down, and o’er the town
Their bursting trumpets blew.”

“Fine big gentleman, your friend,” said the policeman thoughtfully.

"And when they heard that happy word
Policeman leapt and ambled :
The busmen pranced, the maidens danced,
The men in bowlers gambolled."

"Big !" said Mr. Trevor. "Big ? Let me tell you, constable, that the last time Mr. Maturin hit Jack Dempsey, Dempsey bounced back from the floor so quick that he knocked Mr. Maturin out on the rebound."

Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin came on through the night like an avenger through a wilderness, so little did he reck of cruel moons and rude policemen. Said he : "Good evening, Ralph. Good evening, constable. Lo, I am in wine !"

"You've said it," said the policeman.

"Gently, my dear ! Or," said Mr. Maturin cordially, "I will dot you one, and look at it which way you like, it is a far better thing to be in wine than in a hospital. Now, are there any good murders going to-night ?"

"Going ?" said the constable. "I'm 'ere to see there ain't any coming. But I've just been telling this gent about some recent crises. Corpses slit to ribbons just as you or me might slit up a vealanam——"

"Don't say that again !" snapped Mr. Trevor.

"By Heaven, what's that ?" sighed Mr. Maturin ; and, following his intent eyes, they saw, a yard or so behind them on the pavement, a something that glittered in the moonlight. Mr. Trevor says that, without a thought for his own safety, he instantly took a step towards the thing, but that the policeman restrained him. It was Mr. Maturin who picked the thing up. The policeman whistled thoughtfully.

"A razor, let's face it !" whispered Beau Maturin.

"*And sharp !*" said the policeman, thoughtfully testing the glittering blade with the ball of his thumb.

Mr. Trevor says that he was never in his life less conscious of any feeling of excitement. He merely pointed out that he could swear there had been no razor there when he had come round the corner, and that, while he had stood there, no one had passed behind him.

"The chap that owns this razor," said the policeman, emphasising each word with a gesture of the blade, "must 'ave slunk behind you and me as we stood 'ere talking and

dropped it, maybe not finding it sharp enough for 'is purpose. What do you think, Mr. Maturin?"

But Mr. Maturin begged to be excused from thinking, protesting that men are in the hands of God, and God is in the hands of women and so what the devil is there to think about?

Mr. Trevor says that the motive behind his remark at that moment, which was to the effect that he simply must have a drink, was merely that he was thirsty. A clock struck two.

"After hours," said the policeman; and he seemed, Mr. Trevor thought, to grin evilly.

"What do they know of hours," sighed Mr. Maturin, "who only Ciro's know? Come, Ralph. My love, she jilted me but the other night. Therefore I will swim in wine, and thrice will I call upon her name when I am drowning. Constable, good night to you."

"Now I've warned you!" the policeman called after them. "Don't go into any alleys or passages like Lansdowne Passage, else you'll be finding yourselves slit up like vealanampies."

Maybe it was only the treacherous light of the moon, but Mr. Trevor fancied as he looked back that the policeman, where he stood thoughtfully fingering the shining blade, seemed to be grinning evilly at them.

II

They walked in silence, their steps ringing sharp on the bitter-chill air. The night in the sky was pale at the white disdain of the moon. It was Mr. Maturin who spoke at last, saying: "There's too much talk of murder to-night. A man cannot go to bed on such crude talk. You know me, kid. Shall we go to *The Garden of My Grandmother*?"

At that moment a taxi-cab crawled across the moonlight; and the driver, a man in a Homburg hat of green plush, did not attempt to hide his pleasure at being able to satisfy the gentlemen's request to take them to *The Garden of My Grandmother*.

Mr. Trevor says that he has rarely chanced upon a more unsatisfactory taxi-cab than that driven by the man in the

Homburg hat of green plush. By closing one's eyes one might perhaps have created an illusion of movement by reason of certain internal shrieks and commotions, but when one saw the slow procession of shops by the windows and the lamp-posts loitering by the kerb, one was, as Beau Maturin pointed out, justified in believing that the hackney-cab in question was not going fast enough to outstrip a retired Czecho-Slovakian Admiral in an egg-and-spoon race. Nor were they altogether surprised when the taxi-cab died on them in Conduit Street. The man in the Homburg hat of green plush jumped out and tried to re-start the engine. He failed. The gentlemen within awaited the issue in silence. The silence, says Mr. Trevor, grew terrible. But the taxi-cab moved not, and the man in the Homburg hat of green plush began, in his agitation, thumping the carburettor with his clenched fist.

"No petrol," he pleaded. "No petrol."

Said Mr. Trevor to Mr. Maturin: "Let us go. Let us leave this man."

"'Ere, my fare!" said the fellow.

"Your fare?" said Mr. Maturin, with contracted brows.

"What do you mean, 'your fare'?"

"Bob on the meter," said the wretch.

"My friend will pay," said Mr. Maturin, and stalked away. Mr. Trevor says that, while retaining throughout the course of that miserable night his undoubted *flair* for generosity, he could not but hold Beau Maturin's high-handed disavowal of his responsibilities against him; and he was hurrying after him up Conduit Street, turning over such phrases as might best point the occasion and make Mr. Maturin ashamed of himself, when that pretty gentleman swung round sharply and said: "Ssh!"

But Mr. Trevor was disinclined to Ssh, maintaining that Mr. Maturin owed him ninepence.

"Ssh, you fool!" snapped Mr. Maturin; and Mr. Trevor had not obliged him for long before he discerned in the quietness of Conduit Street a small discordant noise, or rather, says Mr. Trevor, a series of small discordant noises.

"She's crying, let's face it," whispered Mr. Maturin.

"She! Who?"

"Ssh!" snapped Mr. Maturin.

They were at that point in Conduit Street where a turn

to the right will bring one into a fat little street which looks blind but isn't, insomuch as close by the entrance to the Alpine Club Galleries there is a narrow passage or alley leading into Savile Row. Mr. Trevor says that the repugnance with which he at that moment looked towards the darkness of that passage or alley had less than nothing to do with the bloodthirsty policeman's last words, but was due merely to an antipathy he had entertained towards all passages or alleys ever since George Tarlyon had seen a ghost in one. Mr. Maturin and he stood for some minutes in the full light of the moon while, as though from the very heart of the opposite darkness, the lacerating tremors of weeping echoed about their ears.

"I can't bear it!" said Beau Maturin. "Come along." And he advanced towards the darkness, but Mr. Trevor said he would not, pleading foot trouble.

"Come," said Beau Maturin, but Mr. Trevor said: "Tomorrow, yes. But not to-night."

Then did Beau Maturin advance alone into the darkness towards the passage or alley, and with one pounce the darkness stole his top-hat from the moon. Beau Maturin was invisible. The noise of weeping abated.

"Oi!" called Mr. Trevor. "Come back, you fool!"

"Ssh!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said bitterly: "You're swanking, that's all!"

"It's a girl!" whispered the voice of Mr. Maturin, whereupon Mr. Trevor, who yielded to no man in the chivalry of his address towards women, at once advanced, caught up Mr. Maturin, and, without a thought for his own safety, was about to pass ahead of him, when Beau Maturin had the bad taste to whisper, "'Ware razors!" and thus again held the lead.

She who wept, now almost inaudibly, was a dark shape just within the passage. Her face, says Mr. Trevor, was not visible, yet her shadow had not those rather surprising contours which one generally associates with women who weep in the night.

"Madam," began Mr. Maturin.

"Oh!" sobbed the gentle voice. "He is insulting me!"

Mr. Trevor lays some emphasis on the fact that throughout the course of that miserable night his manners were a

pattern of courtliness. Thinking, however, that a young lady in a situation so lachrymose would react more favourably to a fatherly tone, he said :—

“My child, we hope——”

“Ah,” sobbed the gentle voice. “Please go away, please ! I am *not* that sort !”

“Come, come !” said Mr. Maturin. “It is us whom you insult with a suspicion so disagreeable. My friend and I are not of the sort to commit ourselves to so low a process as that which is called, I believe, ‘picking up.’”

“We have, as a matter of fact, friends of our own,” said Mr. Trevor haughtily.

“Speaking generally,” said Mr. Maturin, “women like us. Time over again I have had to sacrifice my friendship with a man in order to retain his wife’s respect.”

“Ah, you are a man of honour !” sobbed the young lady.

“We are two men of honour,” said Mr. Trevor.

“And far,” said Mr. Maturin warmly, “from intending you any mischief, we merely thought, on hearing you weeping——”

“You *heard* me, sir !”

“From Conduit Street,” said Mr. Trevor severely, where upon Mr. Maturin lifted up his voice and sang :—

“From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
The street of ties and tailors :
From Conduit Street, from Conduit Street,
A shocking street for trousers.”

“Oh !” sobbed the young lady. “Is this chivalry ?”

“Trousers,” said Mr. Maturin, “are closely connected with chivalry, insomuch as he who commits chivalry without them is to be considered a rude fellow. But, child,” Mr. Maturin protested sincerely, “we addressed you only in the hope that we might be of some service in the extremity of your grief. I assure you that you can trust us, for since we are no longer soldiers, rape and crime have ceased to attract us. However, you do not need us. We were wrong. We will go.”

“It was I who was wrong !” came the low voice ; and Mr. Trevor says that only then did the young lady raise her

face, when it was instantly as though the beauty of that small face sent the surrounding darkness scurrying away. Not, however, that Mr. Trevor was impressed altogether in the young lady's favour. Her eyes, which were large, dark, and charming, appeared to rest on handsome Beau Maturin with an intentness which Mr. Trevor can only describe as bold; while her disregard of his own presence might have hurt him had he, says Mr. Trevor, cared two pins for that kind of thing.

"You see, I have not eaten to-day," the young lady told Beau Maturin, who cried: "But then we *can* help you!"

"Ah, how do I know! Please," the young lady began weeping again, and Mr. Trevor says that had he not hardened his heart he could not say what he might not have done. "Please, sirs, I simply do not know what to do! I am so unhappy, so alone—but you cannot imagine! You are gentlemen?"

"Speaking for my friend," said Mr. Maturin warmly, "he has been asked to resign from Buck's Club only after repeated bankruptcies."

"Mr. Maturin," said Mr. Trevor, "has in his time been cashiered from no less a regiment than the Coldstream Guards."

The young lady did not, however, favour Mr. Trevor with so much as a glance, never once taking her beautiful eye from the handsome face of Beau Maturin. Indeed, throughout the course of that miserable night she admirably controlled any interest Mr. Trevor might have aroused in her, which Mr. Trevor can only account for by the supposition that she must have been warned against him. Beau Maturin, meanwhile, had taken the young lady's arm, a familiarity with which Mr. Trevor cannot too strongly dissociate himself, and was saying:—

"Child, you may come with us, if not with honour, at least with safety. And while you refresh yourself with food and drink you can tell us, if you please, the tale of your troubles. Can't she, Ralph?"

"I don't see," said Mr. Trevor, "what good we can do."

"Your friend," said the young lady sadly to Beau Maturin, "does not like me. Perhaps you had better leave me alone to my misery."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin, guiding her steps down

the fat little street towards Conduit Street, "likes you only too well, but is restraining himself for fear of your displeasure. Moreover, he cannot quickly adapt himself to the company of ingenuous young ladies, for he goes a good deal into society, where somewhat cruder methods obtain."

"But oh, where are you taking me to?" suddenly cried the young lady.

"To *The Garden of My Grandmother*," said Mr. Trevor bitterly, and presently they found a taxi-cab on Regent Street which quickly delivered them at the place in Leicester Square. Mr. Trevor cannot help priding himself on the agility with which he leapt out of that taxi-cab, saying to the driver: "My friend will pay."

But Mr. Maturin, engrossed in paying those little attentions to the young lady which really attractive men, says Mr. Trevor, can afford to neglect, told the driver to wait, and when the driver said he did not want to wait, to go and boil his head.

III

Mr. Trevor describes *The Garden of My Grandmother* in some detail, but that would be of interest only to the specialist. The place was lately raided, and is now closed; and remained open so long as it did only with the help of such devices as commend themselves to those aliens who know the laws of the land only to circumvent them. For some time, indeed, the police did not even know of its existence as a night-club, for the entrance to the place was through two mean-looking doors several yards apart, on one of which was boldly inscribed the word "Gentlemen" and on the other "Ladies."

Within, all was gaiety and *chic*. From the respectable night-clubs and restaurants, all closed by this hour, would come the *jeunesse* if England; and an appetising smell of kippers brought new life to the jaded senses of young ladies, while young gentlemen cleverly contrived to give the appearance of drinking ginger-ale by taking their champagne through straws. Mr. Trevor says, however, that there was not the smallest chance of the place being raided on the night in question, for among the company was a Prince of the Blood; and it is an unwritten law in the Metropolitan Police Force

that no night-club shall be raided while a Prince of the Blood is pulling a party therein.

The young lady and our two gentlemen were presently refreshing themselves at a table in a secluded corner; and when at last only the wine was left before them, Mr. Maturin assumed his courtliest manner to beg the young lady to tell her tale, and in detail, if she thought its relation would relieve her at all. She thought, with all the pensive beauty of her dark eyes, that it would, and immediately began on the following tale :—

THE TALE OF THE BULGARIAN GIRL

I am (she said) twenty-three years old, and although I once spent two years in England at a boarding-school in Croydon, my life hitherto has been lived entirely in Bulgaria. My father was a Bulgar of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff, my mother an Englishwoman of the Lancashire branch of the race of Jones, and for her tragic death in a railway accident just over a year ago I shall grieve all my life : which, I cannot help praying, may be a short one, for I weary of the insensate cruelties that every new day opens out for me.

I must tell you that my mother was an unusual woman, of rigid principles, lofty ideals, and a profound feeling for the grace and dignity of the English tongue, in which, in spite of my father's opposition, for the Samsonoffs are a bitter proud race, she made me proficient at an early age. Never had this admirable woman a thought in her life that was not directed towards furthering her husband's welfare and to obtaining the happiness of her only child ; and I am convinced that my father had not met his cruel death two months ago had she been spared to counsel him.

My father came of an ancient Macedonian house. For hundreds of years a bearer of the name of Samson Samsonovitch Samsonoff has trod the stark hillsides of the Balkans and raided the sweet, rich valleys about Phillippopolis. As brigands, the Samsonoffs had never a rival ; as *comitadjis*, in war or peace, their name was a name for heroism and of terror ; while as assassins—for the domestic economy of Bulgaria has ever demanded the occasional services of a hawk's eye and a ruthless hand—a Samsonoff has been

honourably associated with some of the most memorable *coups* in Balkan history. I am well aware that pride of family has exercised a base dominion over the minds of many good men and women ; yet I do not hesitate to confess that it is with almost unbearable regret that I look upon the fact that I, a wretched girl, am the last and only remnant of our once proud house.

Such a man it was whom my mother, while accompanying her father, a civil engineer, through Bulgaria, married. Nor did it need anything less than the ardour of her love and the strength of her character to seduce a Samson Samsonovitch from the dour dominion of the hills to the conventional life of the valleys. I loved my father, but cannot be blind to the grave flaws in his character. A tall, hairy man, with a beard such as would have appalled your English description of Beaver, he was subject to ungovernable tempers and, occasionally, to regrettable lapses from that moral code which is such an attractive feature of English domestic life. Ah, you who live in the content and plenty of so civilized a land, how can you even imagine the horrors of lawlessness that obtain among primitive peoples ! Had it not that good woman my mother always willed him to loving-kindness, Samsonovitch Samsonoff had more than once spilled the blood of his dearest friends in the heat of some petty tavern brawl.

We lived in a farmhouse in what is surely the loveliest valley in the world, that which is called the Valley of the Roses, and whence is given to the world that exquisite essence known as *attar* of roses. Our little household in that valley was a happy and united one ; more and more infrequent became my father's demoniac tempers ; and, but for his intolerance of fools and cravens, you had taken the last of the Samsonoffs to be a part of the life of the valley-men, of whose industry, the cultivation of roses, he rapidly became a master.

Thus we come to the time which I now think of as two months before my mother's death. My father had attained to a certain degree of wealth, and was ever enticing my mother with dreams of a prolonged visit to her beloved birthplace, Southport, which is, I believe, a pretty town on the seaboard of Lancashire, and which I look forward with delight to visiting. While enticing her, however, with such visions, he did not hesitate to warn her that she must wait on the issue

of his fanciful hobby, which daily grew on him ; for the last of the Samsonoffs had become an inventor of flowers !

You may well look bewildered. But had you known my father you would in some measure have understood how a man, of an extreme audacity of temperament, might be driven into any fanciful pursuit that might lend a spice to a life of intolerable gentility. Nor was that pursuit so fanciful as might at first appear to those of conventionally studious minds : my father had a profound knowledge of the anatomy of flowers ; and was in the habit of saying that he could not but think that the mind of man had hitherto neglected the invention and cultivation of the most agreeable variations. In fine, the tempestuous but simple mind of Samsonovitch Samsonoff had been captivated by the possibility of growing green carnations.

My mother and I were, naturally enough, not at all averse from his practising so gentle a hobby as the invention and cultivation of improbable flowers. And it was long before we even dreamt of the evil consequences that might attend so inoffensive an ambition. But my poor mother was soon to be rid of the anxieties of this life.

One day she and I were sitting in the garden discussing the English fashion-journals, when, silently as a cloud, my father came out of the house and looked towards us in the half-frowning, half-smiling way of his best mood. Tall and patriarchal, he came towards us—and in his hand we saw a flower with a long slender stem, and we stared at it as though we could not believe our eyes, for it was a green carnation !

“You have painted it !” we cried, my mother and I, for his success had seemed to us as remote as the stars.

“I have *made* it !” said my father, and he smiled into his beard, which was ever his one confidential friend. “Women, I have made it in my laboratory. And as I have made this I can make thousands, millions, and thousands of millions !”

He waved a closely-covered piece of paper towards me. “My daughter,” he said, “here is your dower, your heritage. I am too old to burden myself with the cares of great riches, but by the help of this paper, you, my beloved child, will become an heiress who may condescend to an Emperor or an American. We will not lose a minute before going to England, the land of honest men, to put the matter of the patent in train. For on this paper is written the formula by which

green carnations, as well as all previously known varieties of carnations, can be *made* instead of grown. *Made*, I say, instead of grown! Women, do you understand what it is that I have achieved? I have stolen something of the secret of the sun!"

"Samson, boast not!" cried my mother, but he laughed at her and fondled me, while I stared in great wonder at the slip of paper that fluttered in his hand and dreamed the fair dreams of wealth and happiness in a civilized country. Ah, me, ah me, the ill-fated excellence of dreams! For here I am in the most civilized country in the world, a pauper, and more wretched than a pauper!

Our preparations for removal to England were not far advanced before that happened which brought the first cruel turn to our fortunes. On an evil day my mother set out to Varna to buy some trivial thing, and—but I cannot speak of that, how she was returned to us a mangled corpse, her dear features mutilated beyond recognition by the fury of the railway accident.

My father took his sudden loss strangely: it was as though he was deprived at one blow of all the balance, the restraint, with which so many years of my mother's influence had softened the dangerous temper of the Samsonoff; and the brooding silence he put upon his surroundings clamoured with black thoughts. Worst of all, he began again to frequent the taverns in the valley, wherein he seemed to find solace in goading to fury the craven-hearted lowlanders among whom he had lived in peace for so long. The Samsonoff, in short, seemed rapidly to be reverting to type; and I, his daughter, must stand by and do nothing, for my influence over him was never but of the pettiest sort.

The weeks passed, and our preparations for departure to England proceeded at the soberest pace. In England we were going to stay with my mother's brother, a saintly man of some little property who lived a retired life in London, and whose heir I would in due course be, since he was himself without wife or children.

My father, never notable for the agreeable qualities of discretion and reticence, soon spread about the report of his discovery of the green carnation. He could not resist boasting of it in his cups, of the formula with which he could always make them, of the fortune he must inevitably make. Nor did he hesitate to taunt the men of the valley, they who

came of generations of flower-growers, with his own success in an occupation which, he said, he had never undertaken but at a woman's persuasion, since it could be regarded as manly only by those who would describe as manly the painted face of a Circassian eunuch. Thus he would taunt them, laughing me to scorn when I ventured to point out that even worms will turn and cravens conspire. Woe and woe to the dour and high-handed in a world of polity, for their fate shall surely find them out!

One day, having been to the village to procure some yeast for the making of a *yaourt* or *yawort*, which is that same Bulgarian "sour milk" so strongly recommended to Anglo-Saxon digestions, I was startled, as I walked up the path to the door, by the bruit of loud, rough voices. Only too soon was my fear turned to horror. One of the voices was my father's, arrogant and harsh as only his could be, with a sneer like a snake running through it. The other I could not recognize, but could hear only too well that it had not the soft accents of the men of the valley; and when, afraid to enter, I peered in through the window, I saw my father in violent altercation with a man his equal in stature and demeanour—another bearded giant, as fair as my father was dark, and with the livid eyes of a wolf.

What was my horror on recognizing him as Michaelis the *comitadji*, the notorious and brutal Michaelis of the hills. The Michaelis and the Samsonovitch Samsonoffs had always been the equal kings of the *banditti*, and, in many a fight between Christian and Turk, the equal champions of the Cross against the Crescent. And now, as I could hear through the window, the last of the Michaelis was asking of the last of the Samsonoffs some of his great wealth, that he might arm and munition his troop to the latest mode.

My father threw back his head and laughed. But his laugh had cost him dear had I not screamed a warning, for the Michaelis with the wolfish eyes had raised a broad knife. My father leapt to one side, and taking up the first thing that came to hand, a heavy bottle of *mastic*, crashed it down like an axe on the fair giant's head; and then, without so much as a glance at the unconscious man, and massive though the Michaelis was, slung him over his shoulder, strode out of the house and garden, and flung him into the middle of the roadway, where he lay for long moaning savagely with the

pain of his broken head. I had gone to the aid of the wretch, but my father would not let me, saying that no Michaelis ever yet died of a slap on the crown and that a little blood-letting would clear the man's mind of his boyish fancies. Ah, if it had !

It was at a late hour of the very next night—for since my mother's death my father would loiter in the taverns until all hours—that his hoarse voice roused me from my sleep ; and on descending I found him raging about the kitchen like a wounded tiger, his clothes in disorder and showing grim dark stains that, as I clung to him, foully wetted my hands. I prayed him, in an access of terror, to tell me he was not hurt, for what other protection than him had I in that murderous land ?

"I am not hurt, child," he growled impatiently. "But I have been driven to hurt some so that they can never again feel pain."

They had ambushed him, the cowards, as he came home through the wood—as though a hundred of those maggots of the valley could slay a Samsonovitch Samsonoff ! My father had caught the last of them by the throat, and the trembling coward had saved himself by confessing the plot. It appeared that it was they who had persuaded the Michaelis to visit us the day before, inflaming his fancy with tales of the discovery of the carnation and of the great riches the Samsonoff had concealed about the house. And the Michaelis had come to our house not for part of my father's wealth but for all he could find, as also for the secret of the carnation, which he might sell at a great price to some Jew in Sofia—he had come to kill my father !

"And I, like a fool," cried my father, "only broke the skin of his wolfish head ! Girl, we must be off at once ! I have not lived in unwilling peace all these years to die like a rat ; and now that these weak idiots have failed to kill me, Michaelis and his troop will surround the house, and who shall escape the wolves of the hills ? Now linger not for your clothes and fineries. Grigory Eshekovitch has horses for us at the edge of the wood, and we can make Philippopolis by the morning. Here is all our money in notes. Take them, so that you will be provided for should these scum get me. And the formula—take care of the formula, child, for that is your fortune ! Should I have to stay behind, your mother's brother in

England is a good man and will probably not rob you of more than half the profits of it."

And so we came to leave our beloved home, stealing like thieves through the darkness of a moonless night. How shall I ever forget those desperate moments! Our farm lay far from any other habitation, and a long sloping lane joined our pastures to the extensive Karaloff Wood, a wood always evoked by Bulgarian poets of past centuries as the home of vampires and the kennel of the hounds of hell.

There, at its borders, Grigory Eschekovitch, a homely man devoted to our interests, awaited us with two horses; and, although I could not see his face in the darkness, I could imagine by the tremor of his never very assured voice how pallid, indeed green, it must have been; for poor Grigory Eschekovitch suffered from some internal affection, which had the effect of establishing his complexion very uncertainly.

"Have you seen any one in the wood?" my father asked him.

"No, but I have heard noises," Grigory Eschekovitch trembled.

"Bah!" growled my father. "That was the chattering of your own miserable teeth."

I wonder what has happened to poor Grigory Eschekovitch, whether he survived that hideous night. We left him there, a trembling figure on the borders of the wood, while we put our horses into the heart of that darkness; and I tried to find solace in our desperate situation by looking forward to the safety and comfort of our approaching life in England. Little I knew that I was to suffer such agonies of fear in this huge city that I would wish myself back in the land of wolves!

My dreams were shattered by a low growl from my father, and we pulled up our horses, listening intently. By this time we were about half-way through the wood; and had we not known the place by heart we had long since lost our way, for the curtain of leaves between us and the faint light of the stars made the place too black that we could not even see the faintest glimmer of each other. At last my father whispered that it was all right, and we were in the act of spurring our tired horses for the last dash through the wood when torches flamed on all sides, and we stood as in the tortured light of a crypt in moonlight.

"Samson Samsonovitch," cried a hoarse voice, and like a

stab at my heart I knew it for the voice of the Michaelis, "we hope your sins are not too heavy, for your time has come."

It ill becomes a girl to boast of her parent ; but shall I neglect to mention the stern fortitude, the patriarchal resignation, the monumental bravery, of my father, how he sat his horse still as a rock in a tempest and only his lips moved in a gentle whisper to me. "Child, save yourself," said he, and that was his farewell. "I command you to go—to save yourself and my secret from these hounds. Maybe I, too, will get through. God is as good to us as we deserve. Head right through them. Their aim, between you and me, will be so unsure that we might both escape. Go, and God go with you !"

Can you ask me to remember the details of the awful moment ? The darkness, the flaming torches, the hoarse cries of the bandits as they rode in on us, my father's great courage—all these combined to produce in me a state for which the word "terror" seems altogether too homely. Perhaps I should not have left my father. Perhaps I should have died with him. I did not know what I was doing. Blindly as in a nightmare I spurred my horse midway between two moving torches. The horse, startled already, flew madly as the wind. Cries, curses, shots seemed to sweep about me, envelop me, but terror lent wings to my horse, and the shots and shouts faded behind me as phantoms might fade in a curious wind. Last of all came a fearful fusillade of shots, then a silence broken only by the harsh rustle of the bracken under my horse, which, with the livid intelligence of fear, did not stop before we reached Philippopolis in the dawn.

I was never to see my father again. Until noon of the next day I sat anxiously in the only decent inn of the ancient town, praying that some act of Providence had come to his aid and that he might at any moment appear ; when, from a loquacious person, who did not know my name, I heard that the last of the Samsonoffs had that morning been found in Karaloff Wood nailed to a tree-trunk with eighteen bullet wounds in his body.

I will spare you my reflections on the pass in which I then found myself. No young girl was ever so completely alone as she who sat the day through in the parlour of the Bulgarian inn, trying to summon the energy with which to

arrange for her long journey on the Orient Express to England.

Arrived in London, I at once set out to my uncle's house in Golgotha Road, Golder's Green. I was a little surprised that he had not met me at the station, for I had warned him of my arrival by telegram; but knowing he was a gentleman of particular though agreeable habits, it was with a sufficiently good heart that I rang the bell of his tall, gloomy house, which stood at the end of a genteel street of exactly similar houses.

Allow me, if you please, to hurry over the relation of my further misfortunes. My uncle had died of a clot of blood on the heart a week before my arrival. His property he had, of course, left to me; and I could instantly take possession of his house in Golgotha Road. I was utterly alone.

That was four weeks ago. Though entirely without friends or acquaintance—for my uncle's lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, was a man who bore his own lack of easy conversation and human sympathy with a resigned fortitude worthy of more wretched sorrows—I passed the first two weeks pleasantly enough in arranging the house to my taste, in engaging a housekeeper and training her to my ways, and in wondering how I must proceed as regards the patenting and exploiting of the carnation, the formula for which I kept locked in a secret drawer of my toilet-table.

At the end of three weeks—one week ago—my housekeeper gave me notice of her instant departure, saying that no consideration would persuade her to spend another night in the house. She was, it seemed, psychic, and the atmosphere of the house, which was certainly oppressive, weighed heavily on her mind. She had heard noises in the night, she affirmed, and also spoke indignantly of an unpleasant smell in the basement of the house, a musty smell which she for one made no bones of recognizing as a graveyard consistency; and if she did not know a graveyard smell, she asked, from one of decent origins, who did, for she had buried three husbands?

Of course I laughed at her tremors, for I am not naturally of a nervous temper, and when she insisted on leaving that very day I was not at all disturbed. Nor did I instantly make inquiries for another woman, for I could very well manage by myself, and the work of the house, I thought, must help to fill in the awful spaces made by the utter lack of

companionship. As to any nervousness at being left entirely alone in a house, surrounded as it was by the amenities of Golder's Green, I never gave a thought to it, for I had been inured to a reasonable solitude all my life. And, putting up a notice of "Apartments to Let," in one of the ground-floor windows, I set about the business of the house in something of a spirit of adventure natural, if I may say so, to one of my years.

That, as I have said, was one week ago; and the very next day but one after my housekeeper had left me was to see my hardly-won peace shattered at one blow. I do not know if you gentlemen are aware of the mode of life that obtains in Golder's Green; but I must tell you that the natives of that quarter do not discourage the activities of barrel-organs—a somewhat surprising exercise of restraint to one who has been accustomed to the dolorous and beautiful songs of the Balkan *cziganes*. It is true, however, that these barrel-organs are played mostly by foreigners, and I have been given to understand that foreigners are one of the most sacred institutions of this great country.

The very next morning after my housekeeper had left me I was distracted from my work by a particularly disagreeable combination of sounds, which, I had no doubt, could come only from a barrel-organ not of the first order and the untrained voice of its owner. A little amused, I looked out of the window—and with a heart how still leapt back into the room, for the face of the organ-grinder was the face of the Michaelis!

I spent an hour of agony in wondering if he had seen me, for how could I doubt but that he had followed me to England in quest of the formula of the carnation? At last, however, I decided that he could not have seen me, and I was in some degree calmed by the decreasing noise of the barrel-organ as it inflicted itself on more distant streets. London, I told myself, was a very large city; it was not possible that the Michaelis could have the faintest idea in what part of it I lodged; and it could only have been by the most unfortunate combination of chances that he had brought his wretched organ into Golgotha Road. Nevertheless I took the precaution to withdraw the notice of Apartments to Let from the window, lest yet another unfortunate combination of chances should lead him or his minions to search for lodging in my house.

The next day passed quietly enough. I went out shopping with a veil over my face, for reasons you can well understand. And little did I dream that the approaching terror was to come from a quarter which would only be known to the Michaelis when he was dead.

That evening in my bedroom, in a curious moment of forgetfulness, I chanced to pull the bell-rope. I wanted some hot water, had for the moment forgotten that the silly woman had left me, and only remembered it with a smile when, far down in the basement, I heard the thin clatter of the bell. The bathroom was some way down the passage, and I had reached the door, empty jug in hand, when I was arrested by the sound of approaching steps! They were very faint, they seemed to be coming up from the basement, as though in answer to the bell! I pressed my hand to my forehead in a frantic attempt to collect my wits, and I have no hesitation in saying that for those few moments I was near insane. The accumulation of terrors in my recent life had, I thought, unhinged my mind; and I must that day have engaged a servant and forgotten it.

Meantime the steps ascended, slowly, steadily, exactly as an elderly servant might ascend in answer to the bell; and as they ascended I was driven, I cannot tell you how, somehow past fear. Maybe it was the blood of the Samsonoffs at last raging in me: I was not afraid, and, without locking the door, I withdrew to a far corner of the room, awaiting the moment when the steps must reach the door. I must not forget to add that the empty jug was still in my hand.

Steadily, but with a shuffling as of carpet-slippers, the steps came up the passage: slowly the door was opened, and a gaunt, grey-haired woman in musty black stood there, eyeing me with strange contempt. Fear returned, enveloped me, shook me, and I sobbed, I screamed. The woman did not move, did not speak, but stood there, gaunt and grey and dry, eyeing me with a strange contempt; and on her lined face there was such an undreamt-of expression of evil. Yet I recognized her.

I must tell you that my mother had often, in telling me of her brother, spoken of his confidential housekeeper. My mother was a plain-spoken woman, and I had gathered from her that the woman had exercised some vulgar art to enthrall my poor uncle and had dominated him, to his hurt, in all

things. At the news of this woman's death just before my mother's tragic end, she had been unable to resist an expression of relief ; and I, on having taken possession of the house a few weeks before, had examined with great interest, as girls will, the various photographs of her that stood about the rooms.

It was from these that I recognized the woman who stood in the doorway. But she was dead, surely she had died more than a year ago ! Yet there she now stood, eyeing me with that strange contempt—with such contempt, indeed, that I, reacting from fear to anger, sternly demanded of her what she did there and what she wanted.

She was silent. That was perhaps the most awful moment of all—but no, no, there was worse to come ! For, sobbing with terror, I hurled the empty jug at her vile face with a precision of aim which now astonishes me : but she did not waver so much as the fraction of an inch as the jug came straight at her—and, passing through her head, smashed into pieces against the wall of the passage outside. I must have swooned where I stood, for when I was again conscious of my surroundings she was gone : I was alone ; but, far down in the house, I could hear the shuffling steps, retreating, descending, to the foul shades whence she had come.

Now I am one who cannot bear any imposition ; and unable, despite the witness of my own eyes to believe in the psychic character of the intruder, I ran out of the room and in hot pursuit down the stairs. The gaunt woman must have descended with a swiftness surprising in one of her years, for I could only see her shadow far below, on the last flight of stairs that would take her to the basement. Into that lower darkness, I must confess, I had not the courage to follow her ; and still less so when, on peering down the pitch-dark stairs into the kitchen, I was assailed by that musty smell which my housekeeper had spoken of with such indignant conviction as of a graveyard consistency.

I locked the door of my room and slept, I need scarcely say, but ill that night. However, in the cheerful light of the following morning, I was inclined, as who would not, to pooh-pooh the incredible events of the previous night ; and again pulled the bell-rope, just to see the event, if any. There was ; and, unable to await the ascent of the shuffling steps, I crammed on a hat and ran down the stairs.

The woman was coming upstairs, steadily, inevitably. As she heard me descending she stopped and looked up, and I cannot describe the effect that the diabolical wickedness of her face had on me in the clear daylight. I stopped, was rooted there, could not move. To get to the front door I must pass the foul thing, and that I could not summon the courage to do. And then she raised an arm, as though to show me something, and I saw the blade of a razor shining in her hand. You may well shudder, gentlemen!

When I came to, it was to find myself lying at the foot of the stairs, whither I must have fallen, and the foul thing gone. Why she did not kill me, I do not know. God will pardon me for saying that maybe it had been better if she had, for what miseries are not still in store for me! Trembling and weak, I reached the door and impelled myself into the clear air of morning. Nor could the fact that I had forgotten my veil, and the consequent fear of Michaelis, persuade me to re-enter that house until I had regained some degree of calmness.

All day long I wandered about, knowing neither what to do nor where to go. I am not without some worldly sense, and I knew what little assistance the police could give me in such a dilemma, even had they believed me; while as for the lawyer, Mr. Tarbold, how could I face a man of so little sympathy in ordinary things with such an extraordinary tale?

Towards ten o'clock that night, I determined to return and risk another night in that house; I was desperate with weariness and hunger; and could not buy food nor lodging for the night, for in my flight I had forgotten my purse; while I argued to myself that if, after all, she had intended to murder me, she could without any difficulty have done so that morning when I lay unconscious on the stairs.

My bravery, however, did not help me to ascend the stairs to my bedroom with any resolution. I stole upstairs, myself verily like a phantom. But, hearing no sound in the house, I plucked up the courage to switch on the light on my bedroom landing. My bedroom door stood open, but I could not remember whether or not I had left it so that morning. It was probable, in my hasty descent. I tiptoed to it and peered in—and I take the liberty to wonder whether any man, was he never such a lion-heart, had been less disturbed than I at the sight which the light of the moon revealed to my eyes.

The Michaelis lay full length on the floor, his great fair beard darkened with his blood, which came, I saw, from a great gash behind his ear. Across him, with her back to me, sat straddled the gaunt, foul thing, as silent as the grave. Yet even my terror could not overcome my curiosity as to her actions, for she kept on lowering and raising her left hand to and from the Michaelis's beard, while with her right, in which shone the bloody razor, she sawed the air from side to side. I could not realize what that vile shape was doing—I could, and could not admit the realization. For with her left hand she was plucking out one by one the long hairs of the Michaelis's beard, while with the razor in her right she was slicing them to the floor!

I must have gasped, made some noise, for she heard me; and, turning on me and brandishing the dripping razor, she snarled like an animal and leapt towards me. But I am young and quick, and managed just in time to reach the street door and slam it against her enraged pursuit.

That was last night. Since then, gentlemen, I have wandered about the streets of London, resting a little among the poor people in the parks. I have had no food, for what money I have is in that house, together with the formula for the green carnation; but nothing, not death by exposure nor death by starvation, would induce me to return to the house in Golder's Green while it is haunted by that foul presence. Is she a homicidal lunatic or a phantom from hell? I do not know, I am too tired to care. I have told you two gentlemen my story because you seem kind and capable, and I can only pray that I have not wearied you overmuch. But I do beg you to believe that nothing is further from my mind than to ask, and indeed nothing would induce me to accept, anything from you but the generous sympathy of your understanding and the advice of your chivalrous intelligence. My tale is finished, gentlemen. And, alas, am not I?

IV

Mr. Trevor is somewhat confused in his relation of the course of events immediately subsequent to Miss Samsonoff's narrative. During its course he had time, he says, to study the young lady's beauty, which, though of a very superior

order, was a little too innocent and insipid for his taste. His judgment, however, cannot be entirely fair, for such was the direction of the young lady's eyes that Mr. Trevor could judge of her features only. As to the story itself, Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in his liking for a good story, he could not see his way to considering Miss Samsonoff's notable either for interest, entertainment, or that human note of stark realism which makes for conviction; and while, in the ordinary way, a murderer was to him like a magnet, he could not rouse himself to feel irresistibly attracted towards the ghoul of Golder's Green. It was therefore with surprise not unmixed with pain that he heard Mr. Maturin saying:

"Ralph, we are in luck!"

"To what—" Mr. Trevor could not entirely cleanse his voice from the impurity of sarcasm—"to what do you refer?" But it was not without some compunction that he heard the young lady sigh miserably to Beau Maturin:

"I am afraid I have wearied your friend. Forgive me."

"My friend," said Beau Maturin gently, "is an ass. In point of fact, Miss Samsonoff, far from wearying us, you have put us under a great obligation——"

"Ah, you are kind!" the young lady was moved to sob.

"On the contrary," Mr. Maturin warmly protested, "I am selfish. I gather you have not been reading the newspapers lately? Had you done so, you would have read of a murderer who has recently been loose in London and has so far evaded not only capture but even identification. So far as the public know through the newspapers, this criminal has been responsible for only two or three murders; but this very night my friend and I have had private information to the effect that within the last few weeks twelve mutilated corpses have been found in various parts of London; to which we must now, no doubt, add a thirteenth, the remains of your late enemy, Mr. Michaelis. But where *your* information," said Mr. Maturin gallantly, "is especially valuable, is that the police do not dream that the criminal is of your sex. To my friend and me it is this original point that invests the pursuit——"

"Pursuit?" Mr. Trevor could not help starting.

"—with," said Mr. Maturin coldly, "an added charm. And now with your permission, Miss Samsonoff, we will not only return to you your formula, as to the financial worth of

which I cannot entirely share your late parent's optimism, but also——"

"Also," Mr. Trevor said with restraint, "we will first of all call at Vine Street and borrow a few policemen."

"Oh, yes!" the young lady said eagerly. "We will be sure to need some policemen. Please get some policemen. They will listen to you."

"I do not find an audience so difficult to find as all that," said Mr. Maturin coldly. The London police, Miss Samsonoff, are delightful, but rather on the dull side. They are much given to standing in the middle of crowded roads and dreaming, and in even your short stay in London you must have observed what a serious, nay intolerable, obstruction they are to the traffic. No, no, my friend and I will get this murderer ourselves. Come, Miss Samsonoff."

"But I dare not come with you!" cried the young lady. "I simply dare not approach that house again! May I not await your return here?"

"The attacks of ten murderers," said Mr. Maturin indignantly, "cannot disfigure your person more violently than being left alone in a night-club will disfigure your reputation. Bulgarians may be violent, Miss Samsonoff. But lounge-lizards are low dogs."

Mr. Trevor says that he was so plunged in thought that he did not arise from the table with his usual agility; and the first notice he had that Mr. Maturin had risen and was nearly at the door was on hearing him waive aside a pursuing waiter with the damnable words: "My friend will pay."

Without, the taxi-cab was still waiting. Its driver, says Mr. Trevor, was one of those stout men of little speech and impatient demeanour: on which at this moment was plainly written the fact that he had been disagreeably affected by waiting in the cold for nearly two hours; and on Mr. Maturin's sternly giving him a Golder's Green direction he just looked at our two gentlemen and appeared to struggle with an impediment in his throat.

Golgotha Road was, as the young lady had described it, a genteel street of tall, gloomy houses. Mr. Trevor says that he cannot remember when he liked the look of a street less. The taxi-cab had not penetrated far therein when Miss Samsonoff timidly begged Mr. Maturin to stop its further progress, pointing out that she could not bear to wait immediately

opposite the house and would indeed have preferred to await her brave cavaliers in an altogether different part of London. Mr. Maturin, however, soothed her fears; and, gay as a schoolboy, took the key of the house from her reluctant fingers and was jumping from the cab when Miss Samsonoff cried:

"But surely you have weapons!"

Mr. Trevor says that, while yielding to no one in deploring the use of weapons in daily life, in this particular instance the young lady's words struck him as full of a practical grasp of the situation.

"Of course," said Mr. Trevor nonchalantly, "we must have weapons. How stupid of us to have forgotten! I will go back to my flat and get some. I won't be gone a moment."

"That's right," Mr. Maturin agreed, "because you won't be gone at all. My dear Miss Samsonoff, my friend and I do not need weapons. We put our trust in God and St. George. Come along, Ralph. Miss Samsonoff, we will be back in a few moments."

"And wot do I do?" asked the taxi-driver.

"Nothing," cried Mr. Maturin gaily. "Nothing at all. Aren't you lucky!"

The house which the young lady had pointed out to them had an air of even gloomier gentility than the others, and Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he liked the look of a house less, particularly when the ancient brown door gave to Beau Maturin's hand before he had put the key into the lock. Mr. Trevor could not resist a natural exclamation of surprise. Mr. Maturin begged him not to shout. Mr. Trevor said that he was not shouting, and, without a thought for his own safety, was rushing headlong into the house to meet the terror single-handed when he found that his shoelace was untied.

He found Beau Maturin in what, he supposed, would be called a hall when it was not a pit of darkness. A stealthily lit match revealed that it was a hall, a narrow one, and it also revealed a closed door to the right, by Mr. Trevor's elbow, which he removed. The match went out.

"Quietly," said Mr. Maturin quite unnecessarily, for Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he felt less noisy. He heard the door to his right open, softly, softly.

"Is it you opening that door?" he asked, merely from curiosity.

"Ssh!" snapped Beau Maturin. "Hang on to my shoulder-blades."

Mr. Trevor thought it better to calm Beau Maturin's fears by acceding to his whim, and clung close behind him as they entered the room. The moon, which Mr. Trevor already had reason to dislike, was hanging at a moderate elevation over Golder's Green as though on purpose to reveal the darkness of that room. Mr. Trevor's foot then struck a shape on the floor. The shape was soft and long. Mr. Trevor was surprised. Mr. Maturin whispered:

"Found anything?"

Mr. Trevor said briefly that his foot had.

"So's mine," said Beau Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather soft to the touch."

"And mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're corpses, let's face it," sighed Mr. Maturin. "Making fifteen in all. With us, seventeen. Just give yours a kick, Ralph, to see if it's alive. I've kicked mine."

"I don't kick corpses," Mr. Trevor was muttering when he felt a hard round thing shoved into the small of his back.

"Ow!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Found anything?" said Mr. Maturin.

Mr. Trevor said briefly that there was something against his back.

"And mine," sighed Mr. Maturin. "What's yours like? Mine's rather hard on the back."

"So is mine," said Mr. Trevor.

"They're revolvers, let's face it," sighed Beau Maturin.

"They are," said a harsh voice behind them. "So don't move."

"I've got some sense, thank you," snapped Beau Maturin.

"Sir," said the harsh voice, and it was a woman's voice, "I want none of your lip. I have you each covered with a revolver——"

"Waste," said Beau Maturin. "One revolver would have been quite enough. Besides, my friend and I were distinctly given to understand that you were partial to a razor. Or do you use that for shaving?"

"I use a razor," said the harsh voice, "only when I want to kill. But I have a use for you two."

The light was suddenly switched on, a light so venomous, says Mr. Trevor, that they had to blink furiously. And that must have been a very large room, for they could not see into its far corners. The light came from what must have been a very high-powered lamp directly above a table in the middle of the room; and it was concentrated by a shade in such a way as to fall, like a searchlight, exactly on the two helpless gentlemen. Mr. Trevor says that Beau Maturin's handsome face looked white and ghastly, so the Lord knows what Mr. Trevor's must have looked like. Meanwhile their captor leapt from her station behind them, and they were privileged to see her for the first time. She was, says Mr. Trevor, exactly as Miss Samsonoff had described her, grey and gaunt and dry, and her expression was strangely contemptuous and evil as sin. And never for a moment did she change the direction of her revolvers, which was towards our gentlemen's hearts. Mr. Trevor says he cannot remember when he saw a woman look less afraid that a revolver might go off in her hand.

"Look down," she commanded.

"It's all right," said Beau Maturin peaceably; "we've already guessed what they are. Corpses. Nice cold night for them, too. Keep for days in weather like this."

Mr. Trevor could not resist looking down to his feet. The corpses were of two youngish men in dress-clothes.

"They're cut badly," said Mr. Maturin.

"They're not cut at all," said the woman harshly. "I shot these two for a change."

"I meant their clothes," Mr. Maturin explained. "Death was too good for them with dress-clothes like that."

"Well, I can't stop here all night talking about clothes," snapped the woman. "Now then, to business. These bodies have to be buried in the back-garden. You will each take one. There are spades just behind you. I shall not have the slightest hesitation in killing you as I have killed these two, but it will be more convenient for me if you do as you are told. I may kill you later, and I may not. Now be quick!"

"Lord, what's that!" cried Mr. Trevor sharply. He had that moment realized a strange muffled, ticking noise which must, he thought, come either from somewhere in the room or from a room near by. And, while he was never in his life

less conscious of feeling fear he could not help but be startled by that ticking noise for he had heard it before, when timing a dynamite-bomb.

"That is why," the woman explained with what, Mr. Trevor supposed, was meant to be a smile, "you will be safer in the garden. Women are but weak creatures, and so I take the precaution of having a rather large size in dynamite-bombs so timed that I have but to press a button to send us all to blazes. It will not be comfortable for the police when, if ever, they catch me. But pick up those spades and get busy."

"Now don't be rude," begged Beau Maturin. "I can stand anything from plain women but discourtesy. Ralph, you take the bigger corpse, as you are smaller than I am, while I take this little fellow on my shoulder—which will probably be the nearest he will ever get to Heaven, with clothes cut as badly as that."

"You can come back for the bodies when you've dug the graves," snapped the woman. "Take the spades and go along that passage. No tricks! I am just behind you."

There was a lot of rubbish in that garden. It had never been treated as a garden, it did not look like a garden, it looked even less like a garden than did *The Garden of My Grandmother*. High walls enclosed it. And over it that deplorable moon threw a sheet of dead daylight.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

"Do you mind if we take our coats off?" asked Beau Maturin. Mr. Trevor says that he was being sarcastic.

"I don't mind what you take off," snapped the woman.

"Now don't say naughty things!" said Mr. Maturin. "Nothing is more revolting than the naughtiness of plain women."

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

They dug, says Mr. Trevor, for a long time, for a very long time. Not, however, that it was difficult digging once one had got into the swing of it, for that garden was mostly dug-up soil. Suddenly Beau Maturin said:

"Bet you a fiver I dig a grave for my fellow before you."

"Right!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, and they dug.

"And," said the woman, "I don't allow any betting in this house. So call that bet off."

"What?" said Mr. Maturin.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Maturin threw down his spade.

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor dug.

Mr. Maturin said: "Dig yourself!"

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers.

Mr. Trevor brandished his spade from a distance. He noticed for the first time that they had been digging in the light of the dawn and not of the moon.

"And who the deuce," said Mr. Maturin dangerously, "do you think you are, not to allow any betting? I have stood a lot from you, but I won't stand that."

"Dig," said the woman with the revolvers, but Mr. Maturin advanced upon the revolvers like a punitive expedition. Mr. Trevor brandished his spade.

"Another step, and I fire!" cried the woman harshly.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Maturin. "I'll teach you to stop me betting! And I hate your face."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" the woman suddenly cried with a face of fear, and, lowering her revolvers, fled into the house.

Mr. Trevor was so surprised that he could scarcely speak. Mr. Maturin laughed so much that he could not speak.

"What's there to laugh about?" Mr. Trevor asked at last.

"It's funny. They've had us, let's face it. Come on, let's follow her in."

"She may shoot," Mr. Trevor cautioned.

"Shoot my eye!" sighed Beau Maturin.

Once in the house, Mr. Trevor stopped spellbound. There were voices, there was laughter—from the room of the two corpses!

"They're laughing at us!" said Mr. Trevor.

"Who wouldn't!" laughed Beau Maturin, and, opening the door said: "Good morning."

"You've said it," said the policeman. "Haw-haw!"

"You'll have some breakfast?" asked the woman with the revolvers.

"Please do!" said Miss Samsonoff.

"You *ought* to be hungry," said the taxi-driver with the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Look here!" gasped Mr. Trevor. "What the blazes——"

"Haw-haw!" laughed the policeman. "'Ave a bit of vealanam-pic?"

"Now, Ted, don't be rude to the gentlemen!" said the woman with the revolvers.

"Quite right, mother," said Miss Samsonoff. "We owe these gentlemen an explanation and an apology——"

"And if they don't take it we *are* in the soup!" miserably said the man in the Homburg hat of green plush.

"Now, you two, go and get the cups and plates for the two gentlemen," said the woman with the revolvers to the two corpses in dress-clothes.

"Listen, please," Miss Samsonoff gravely addressed Mr. Maturin, "my name isn't Samsonoff at all but Kettlewell, and that's my mother and these are my four brothers——"

"How do you do?" said Mr. Maturin, absently drinking the policeman's coffee, but Mr. Trevor is glad that no one heard what he said.

"You see," said Miss Kettlewell, and she was shy and beautiful, "we are The Kettlewell Film Company, just us, but of course we haven't got a lot of money——"

"A 'lot' is good!" said the policeman.

"My brother there," and Miss Kettlewell pointed to the wretched man with the Homburg hat of green plush, "was the director of an American company in Los Angeles, but he got the sack lately and so we thought we would make some films on our own. You see, we are such a large family! And the recent murders gave us a really brilliant idea for a film called 'The Ghoul of Golder's Green,'* which, thanks to you two gentlemen, we have completed to-night. Oh, I do hope it will be a success, especially as you have been kind enough to help us in our predicament, for we hadn't any money to engage actors—and we did so need two gentlemen, just like you, who really looked the part, didn't we, mother?"

"But, my dear child," cried Beau Maturin. "I'm afraid your film can't have come out very well. Trevor and I will look perfectly ghastly, as we neither of us had any make-up on."

"But it's that kind of film!" smiled Miss Kettlewell.

* When the film was released by the Kettlewell Film Corporation, evidences of public favour were so notably lacking that it was offered to the Society for Presenting Nature Films to the Blind.

Surely, after the above exposure of the methods adopted, no further reasons should be sought for the so much deplored inferiority of British films.

"You see, you and your friend are supposed to be corpses who, by some powerful psychic agency are digging your own graves—Heavens, what's that?"

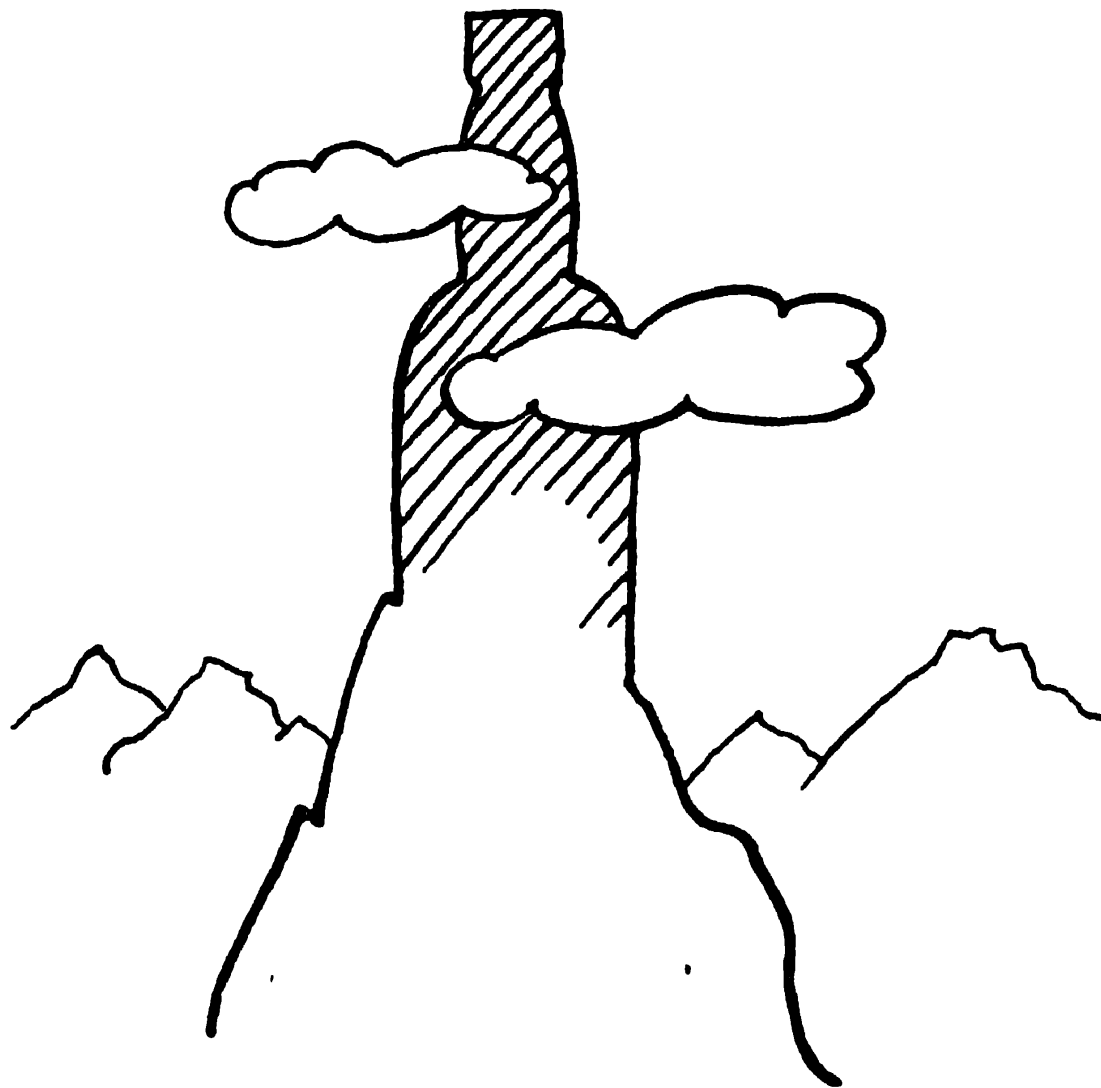
There, at the open door, stood an apparition with a dreadful face. He appeared, says Mr. Trevor, to have some difficulty in choosing among the words that his state of mind was suggesting to him.

"And me?" gasped the taxi-driver hoarsely. "Wot abaht me? 'Angingabahtallnight! 'Oo's going to pay me, that's wot I want to know? There's four quid and more on that clock——"

Mr. Maturin swept his empty coffee-cup round to indicate the family Kettlewell.

"My friends will pay," sighed Mr. Maturin.

THE MOUNTAIN



J. J. BELL

J. J. BELL, journalist and author, was probably best known as the creator of "Wee Macgregor" and other amusing Scottish characters, but he also wrote a large number of novels and one-act plays.

THE MOUNTAIN

THE two-seater came bumping down the rough, gravelly cart-track—the first motor vehicle ever seen at Achnadamph, which is not to say that the inhabitants of the township (seventeen souls) had never seen a motor-car before.

Achnadamph, after all, is only seven miles off the main road, though, to be sure, it is somewhat remote from what some of us call civilization, its distance from the nearest licensed premises being no less than thirty-two miles. It lies near the head of Glen Bogie, in the benevolent shadow of Ben Bogie—benevolent, since among its rude, forbidding neighbour peaks the mountain provides an oddly gracious, shapely and green appearance. Once in a while somebody makes its ascent, though not from Glen Bogie, which would involve a fairly long tramp before the climb could be begun. Strangers are rare in Glen Bogie—an occasional angler, a party of shooters in the season—and they seldom come within a mile or two of Achnadamph. The Glen receives an abundant rainfall, the climate generally is mild and relaxing, but in spite of their remoteness the inhabitants on their crofts are probably as happily contented as any of us in these uncertain, troublous times.

The arrival of the two-seater was, of course, an event. Work on the nearer crofts and in the cottages thereon was suspended. A straggling procession began to move up the track to meet the daring motorist, who came down cautiously and at intervals stopped—apparently looking for a space in which to turn safely.

Observing the procession, he drew up and waited. Then, as it drew near, he got out, stretched himself, lighted a cigarette, and surveyed the scene, very wild yet lovely. It was one of those perfect summer days on which the visitor to the West Highlands can almost forgive and forget a week of the worst possible weather. In his rough Harris tweeds, with his

sunburnt countenance and greying hair, the motorist presented a thick-set, sturdy figure. His jaw was square, his mouth humorous.

"He will be a tourist," remarked one of the two men who led the procession—Roderick MacDonald, a wiry, middle-aged person, with a heavy black moustache, which gave him a sinister look, and a three days' growth on his chin.

"Then it will be no good news for any of us here," said his companion—Alan MacDonald, an old man with a white beard; "Alexander MacDonald was saying it might be somebody to tell him that his wealthy uncle had at long last passed away."

It may be mentioned here that most of the inhabitants of Achnadamph were MacDonalds. The old man spoke in his native tongue, but the first speaker used the English. Roderick MacDonald was not as his neighbours were. Once he had gone abroad to make his fortune. At the end of five years he had returned, without any evidence of having done so, yet with a certain air of superiority. Whenever possible he used the English, including words which impressed, when they did not puzzle and annoy, his neighbours. Among other things he declared himself an abstainer, and missed no opportunity of dwelling on the evils of alcohol in any form, especially that of whisky. His neighbours resented this, which was natural enough, considering that their indulgence in alcohol was perforce limited to the occasions of weddings and funerals, neither of which took place in the Glen once in four years.

His neighbours resented other things—a good many other things—but Roderick, with his superior knowledge of the world, was too much for their simpler minds. He had not been six months home when he became the dominating personality in Achnadamph.

"Now," he said, as he and the patriarch, without the authority of one, approached the stranger, "I will be spokesman. You do not need to be opening your mouth at all."

"For why should I not be speaking to the gentleman?" said Alan, in feeble protest. "Am I not the oldest man in this place?"

"It is an honourable thing to be the oldest man," was the reply, "but it is more seemly to hold your tongue when you have not got the good English."

"I have plenty of the good English to speak to a gentleman. Have I not spoke to Sir Andrew——?"

"Do not be letting your pride go before a fall! I can see from his stockings, which are of a tartan not of the earth nor of the heavens above, that the gentleman is a Sassenach, who would not understand you, and it would be a great pity to affront yourself and the population of Achnadamph before him. I will be spokesman."

By this time "the population" was close behind, and suddenly Roderick turned about and held up his hand, saying :

"Do not come any nearer, or you will be incommodating and obstreperating the gentleman to your great shame afterwards. I will be spokesman."

Turning again, he advanced towards the stranger, followed closely, however, by Alan, and, more gradually, by the others, men, women, and two small children.

"Good morning, sir," he said pleasantly. "Were you taking the wrong road with your car?"

"Good morning! Not exactly," the stranger said. "I wanted to have a look at the Glen, though I dare say I should have done without had I known what the road was like. Still, it's worth the trouble. That's a glorious mountain you have! Ben Bogie, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," old Alan made haste to say. "It is a very good mountain."

"An excellent mountain!" said Roderick, giving him a nudge.

"The view from the top must be wonderful."

"It will be a very good view, sir," said Alan.

"A most superior view!" corrected Roderick. "I am sure it will be a superior view, sir."

"What!" cried the stranger. "Never been up?"

"Nobody here," Roderick replied with dignity, "has ever been up. We are all far too busy with our crofts for such frivolous pleasures."

"My grandfather," old Alan put in, "was once going up to the very top, and was seeing Inverness and Glasgow and America."

"America! Some eyesight!" exclaimed the stranger, laughing.

This time the nudge was almost painful. "Can you not be holding your tongue!" muttered Roderick; and aloud: "Be pleased to excuse him, sir. He is as ignorant as a very child about geography and other obscene matters. But, you see, it would not be natural for any of us to be taking the great trouble of going up yon hill. We are not shepherds or deer-stalkers, and our cattle are never crossing the river yonder; so we are not crossing, either, and you have to be crossing to get to the foot of Ben Bogie. It would be just foolishness to be going away up in the air, and maybe the clouds, for nothing at all—no remuneration whatsoever."

"Well, it's no affair of mine," the stranger remarked, now disposed to believe all the untruths he had heard concerning the laziness of the West Highland people, "but I must say I'm surprised at a hardy set of men like you."

"My grandfather was a very hardy——"

Old Alan's speech was cut short by a dunt in the ribs that sent most of the breath from his body.

"Well, now," said the stranger, "perhaps you will kindly tell me of a place where I can turn my car."

"With great pleasure! If you will go carefully round yon big rock at the corner, you will come to plenty of room in front of Alan MacDonald's byre, which is a perfect disgrace to Achnadamph. I will now go in front to directify you."

Presently the car was going slowly down a steep stretch, followed by "the population," including old Alan, who must have burst with his indignation had not some of it escaped in gusts of Gaelic. Most of the hearers were sympathetic enough, though they could offer neither comfort nor encouragement. At one time or another every one of them had experienced a similar emotion. But what could they do? What could anybody do with a man like Roderick, whose flow of fine English simply drowned opposition before it could raise its head?

On reaching the grassy space between old Alan's cottage and byre, the stranger lost no time in turning. Observing a little boy and girl in the group of onlookers, he beckoned them over, and gave each a florin, bidding them grow big and strong and climb Ben Bogie. Possibly they did not understand what he was saying, but in any case the sight of the

silver would have stricken them dumb. Their astounded countenances revealed their gratification.

With a word of thanks to Roderick and another to Alan, congratulating him on his distinguished ancestor, which the old man took seriously and gratefully, the stranger started the car and was presently grinding up the hill—and chuckling at an idea which had just struck him.

No doubt Achnadamph would have forgotten the event—within the coming year or so—but on the very next morning the car was again observed bumping down the hill. By the time it stopped at the grassy space, most of “the population” had gathered there.

This time the stranger was not alone. He had a passenger in the shape of a tall, hefty gillie. Both alighted, and it was observed that they were carrying staffs and wearing stout climbing boots.

“We are going to take the long way up Ben Bogie,” the stranger announced, and turned to old Alan. “May I leave my car here?”

“Certainly, by all means, with great pleasure,” came the reply—from Roderick. “It will be quite safe here, sir, and I will be taking every care of it.”

The stranger proceeded to make some small preparations. Producing a knapsack, he fitted it upon the gillie’s shoulders; into it he packed two sandwich tins, a couple of lemons, and a pair of thermos flasks. Then from the car he brought a parcel, whose shape to the innocent eye would have suggested a bar of common soap. For reasons best known to himself he opened it, and took out the contents.

A murmur went through “the population.” A bottle of whisky—a whole bottle of “Long Tom—the Dew of Glen Bogie.”

“I’m no judge,” he said to Alan, who was at his side. “Do you happen to know if ‘Long Tom’ is good stuff?”

“Oh, Cod!” the old man fervently sighed. “It is the very best! I once had a cousin with a bottle of it, and he was giving me a dram—just like cream!”

“I was once at a wedding,” said a small man, Alexander MacDonald, “where there was a bottle or two of ‘Long Tom’; it was the noblest wedding I ever saw; but that was in the good old days when the price was only three-and-six, and

other common whisky was only three shillings. And now it is twelve-and-six—tarnn the Government !”

“Behave yourself, Alexander, and you, too, Alan !” said the stern voice of Roderick.

“What do *you* say about it ?” asked the stranger.

“In my young and balmy days,” Roderick replied, “I would have said that ‘Long Tom’ was the king of all the whiskies, but I have been an abstainer from all intoxicating fluids for a thousand—I mean seven years, and now I am saying it is a deplorable and deleerious beeverage !”

“Really !” said the stranger, restraining his amusement, and proceeded to repack the bottle, after which he placed it in the knapsack, and fastened the straps. “Well, shall we start, Donald ?”

The gillie, who had been surveying the country, asked a few questions of the men about him, received their answers, and declared himself read .

With a friendly wave and a “See you in the evening, sometime,” the stranger moved off.

For a long time they watched the pair going up the Glen, on the other side of the river, and little or no work was done in Achnadamph that day.

“They will have a glorious time on the top,” little Alexander MacDonald mournfully remarked. “I hope they will bring back the empty bottle. I will be offering the gentleman a penny for it. A snuff of it would be better than nothing. Oh, yes,” he added in response to several requests, “if I get it, you will all get a wee snuff. I am not greedy.”

“It would be a terrible thing,” quoth old Alan, in the Gaelic, of course, “if they were leaving the bottle empty on the top, for the next climber to behold. Oh, what a sorrowful sight—enough to make a man’s heart bleed !”

“If you were not an aged buffoon, Alan MacDonald, and not long for this world,” said Roderick, “I would be making your nose to bleed. What an example to these women of weak intellects and the children of tender years. You ought to be black ashamed of yourself, and you, too, Alexander, and all of you ! Now I will be putting up a silent prayer that the bottle may fall from the gentleman’s hands and be dashed into a thousand hundred pieces !”

In the early dusk the mountaineers returned.

"A fairly stiff climb, but we took it pretty easy," the stranger reported. "The view was magnificent. If I had my way, you'd all be on the top to-morrow, gazing at the glorious country you don't deserve to belong to!"

"Excuse me, sir," said little Alexander very respectfully, "but were you bringing back the empty bottle of 'Long Tom'?"

The stranger smiled. "Why, no! The bottle is safe on the top of Ben Bogie."

"Empty?" came the groan from several breasts.

"Full!" was the astounding answer. "Full and unopened! Donald and I did not want any whisky, so we left it there—in case, one of these days, some of you might take a notion for the view."

"Cod preserve us!" wailed old Alan. "A bottle of 'Long Tom' on Ben Bogie! My grief, but my aged legs would never get there!"

The stranger gave him a kind look. "Never mind!" he murmured, and turned to the others. "I will tell you just where I put it. The top is pretty rough, and there are four big rocks almost in a straight line from north to south. Under the third rock, going south, in a hollow, lies the bottle of 'Long Tom.'" He looked at his watch. "Get on board, Donald. Sorry, friends, my holiday is at its end, but I shall hope to run down and see you all next summer. Good-bye!"

To the old man he said: "Thanks for letting me park the car here"—and slipped something into his hand; then got on board and started the engine.

A minute later old Alan was exhibiting to his wife a pound note, while Roderick, who seemingly did not apply his temperance principles to his language, declaimed:

"And after all I was doing for him! He is surely a —— bad egg in a —— tourist's clothing!"

That night many eyes watched Ben Bogie as it faded into the darkness.

Next morning the adult males of Achnadamph rose earlier than usual—all except old Alan. Each hoped he was the earliest. Little Alexander MacDonald even flattered himself that he was. He had just started to go down the moor towards the river when he was hailed by Roderick.

"Alexander MacDonald, where are you off to this fine morning?"

In some confusion Alexander replied: "I got up too early by mistake, and was just for taking a wee walk before my porridge."

"Then I will be taking a wee walk with you. And yonder is Hector MacDonald coming out of his house—and Angus, too! How early we all are this morning, to be sure!"

The idea of stealing a march was thus nipped in the bud. It is true that in the dead of night Alexander again set out, but he had not gone a mile when old legends of the water-kelpie and other horrors in the hollows over yonder got the better of his courage, so that he turned shuddering and came home with all speed.

But something had to be done. Ben Bogie, except when shrouded in mist, which was not seldom, was become a thing that mocked. One evening there was a meeting in Alan MacDonald's house, convened by the old man himself. The five other adults—Roderick had not been invited—were there.

"I am feeling very sorry for you all," said Alan, "and I have been making a plan for your great satisfaction. I am not wishing anything for my trouble, for the gentleman was very kind to me, and now I can be getting a bottle of 'Long Tom' for myself when I like. Indeed, I am ready to pay a little to help you."

"What is the plan, Alan?" respectfully asked little Alexander MacDonald.

"It is quite simple. You have only to get Roderick MacDonald to go up Ben Bogie and fetch for you the bottle of 'Long Tom.'"

They gazed at him in dismay—horrified dismay.

"No, I am not mad," said Alan. "You think he will not do it, but I think he will—if you make it worth his while. Roderick is a greedy man. He is very fond of money. He is fonder of money than of temperance. Now listen! I will give two shillings, and if you will give sixpence each, I believe he will be satisfied and do what you ask."

Alan paused to reflect, then continued: "Yes, he will do it! Mind, I am not asking for any of the whisky. Maybe you think two glasses each is not very much, but it is a good dram for sixpence."

"And so it is," agreed Alexander, "especially when it is 'Long Tom'! A very good dram!"

There were murmurs of agreement.

"Well, now, here is the two shillings, Alexander. Do not tell him you got it from me. Say nothing about me at all. Go and see him now, and let me know secretly what he says."

They went to Roderick MacDonald. At first he was vastly indignant, declared himself to be grossly insulted, and confounded them with avalanches of English, full of huge words that stunned their intelligence. Afterwards, however, he cooled down. In haughty tones he said:

"After all, it is very likely superfluously hopeless for me to think of converting you from your vile habits of dissolutio-
tion; and I would not like to have some nice young tourist going up Ben Bogie, and finding the bottle, and becoming a dipsolunatic on the spot, and for evermore! But you will have to pay me more for my trouble and all the perils and dangers, and so forth."

Followed twenty minutes of haggling, at the end of which he had screwed up the joint fee to six shillings.

"Furthermore," he went on, "I must have the money in advance. I might have an accident on the mountain; I might fall down a precipice; and the money would not half pay for the cuts and bruises and the general debility."

"But if the bottle is getting broken when you fall?" ventured little Alexander.

"I am an honourable man. I will take every care of the disreputable bottle. But I am running a risk, and so must you. Give me the money now, and I will start at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, if the weather is fine and clear."

Ultimately they gave him the money, and went to their homes to spend restless nights, wondering about the weather.

The morning broke fine; by eight o'clock a beautiful day appeared certain. In good time they gathered at Roderick's house, each carrying a wrapping of some sort to be used for protecting the precious bottle.

"I will never get to the top if I inaccommodate myself with all these things," said Roderick, and chose an old muffler and two yards of string.

He was a man of his word. At nine he set out, with pockets full of food, and a large flask of cold tea, followed by the fervent wishes of the subscribers, also their admonitions as to shielding the bottle if he felt himself about to fall.

It was a long, long day. Work went on as usual in the homes, for the good wives were not particularly interested in this mountaineer, though they were cross enough with their men; but very little was done on the crofts. It was a long evening, too; it passed without sign of Roderick. According to arrangement, they were not to go to meet him, but to await him outside his house.

"I am very much afraid," said little Alexander, for the tenth time, voicing the fears of the others, "that there has been a serious accident to 'Long Tom.'"

The dusk deepened. In the depths of the glen it was so murky that they could not have detected any movement there. And they were almost startled when Roderick suddenly appeared in the gloom, coming up from the river.

He approached wearily, slowly, on faltering feet. They did not hail him, but a sigh of relief went up when they perceived that one of his pockets was bulging.

"It is all right," whispered someone; "it is safe in the muffler—Cod bless it! He has not done so badly after all."

He reached his home and in the little porch turned and faced them, and spoke.

"I am quite exhausted. It was a beautiful view, but the climb up was most obnoxious. I was so tired I had to take a sleep on the top. But it was a most obnoxious view, though the climb up was——"

"You can tell us all about it in the morning," Alexander interrupted. "We do not wish to keep you from your bed, so give us the 'Long Tom,' which you have brought home so safe and sound to its true and rightful owners."

Roderick's hand went to his pocket and brought out the bundle. Unwinding the old muffler, he disclosed his tea-flask. He let flask and muffler fall at his feet. He leaned his back heavily against the door and, before anyone could speak said:

"It was not worth while to bring home the bottle that long, long way. You will all be greatly benefishialized without the 'Long Tom.'"

Murmurs rose.

"Where," demanded Alexander, "is the bottle?"

"I fell."

There was a shocked silence till Alexander further demanded:

"Where are the cuts and bruises?"

Roderick made a grand effort to remain dignified.

"I fell," he said slowly and rather thickly, "but it was not a vulgar, corpuscular fall. I fell—metaphysically."

Naturally enough, they did not follow him, and for the moment they stood dumb.

From his trousers-pocket he brought something in his closed hand.

"It would have been all right if it had been a cork, for, of course, I had no corkscrew," he said. "This thing was invented by the devil." He opened his hand.

Alexander struck a match. The flame glinted on a patent screw-top.

At that moment his wife opened the door and he tumbled in—which was probably the best thing he could have done in the circumstances.

But old Alan MacDonald was the pleased and happy man.

"It was well worth the two shillings! Now, Mary," he said to his wife, "there will be no more crowing from that one, and once more I will be the first man in Glen Bogie!"

And it was so.

THE GREAT MAMMOTH STORY



STELLA GIBBONS

STELLA GIBBONS left University College, London, to be secretary to the editor of a London evening paper. She has contributed verse and short stories to various journals and jumped into prominence with *Cold Comfort Farm*, a hilarious burlesque of the "back-to-the-soil" novels. Among her later books, previous to *Miss Linsey and Pa*, are *Basset* and *The Untidy Gnome*—the latter a fairy story in the old tradition.

THE GREAT MAMMOTH STORY

“**A**ND don't make the mistake of thinkin' your Dad's money and his being an M.P. means anything to Cosmos Publicity, Mr. Field. Once you step inside this building of a morning, you're an employee of this firm, and nothing more.”

There was a pause, while the departmental manager turned his attention angrily to the ringing telephone.

Claude Field sat staring at the tip of his shoe and swinging it gently to and'fro, exactly as he had sat since Mr. Sprott began to talk ten minutes ago.

He did not resent this dressing-down; he admitted that he was indolent, inefficient and unpunctual. But he was also bored; a state of mind unknown to the personnel which laboured to make Cosmos Publicity, Limited, even larger, richer and more public than it already was.

“Ants, my dear soul, positive ants,” was how he had described the staff of Cosmos Publicity, to a younger sister on his return from his first day there. All toiling and moiling (whatever moiling may be) and laying up hay for the rainy day and all the rest of it. Very exhausting. I'm not at all sure that I shall be able to cope.”

His prophecy was fulfilled. After six months with the firm, Claude was invited to see Mr. Sprott in his office.

The receiver was slammed angrily down.

“... and it all reflects on the firm, Mr. Field,” resumed Mr. Sprott, turning on Claude a long North-country face bitter as an east wind. “You may think that your duties are slight, and so they are, but the life of a machine Mr. Field, is dependent upon the efficiency of the smallest cog in that machine, and details are important... as you may one day learn. I take a serious view of this matter. I am warning you, Mr. Field. This is not the first time, I believe, that you have received a hint that Cosmos is dissatisfied with your work. Unless you can make a drastic

change in your methods, Cosmos has no further use for you."

He leant forward, his forefinger on a bell push and looked full with his frosty eyes into Claude's mild young face.

"Oh I say, sir," protested Claude, as he stood up, "that's a bit thick, isn't it? I mean to say . . . well, the trouble is, you know, I'm not cut out for routine work. I'd much sooner have a stab at the creative side of the business; copy-writing and thinking up stunts and all that. I feel sure I could do that sort of thing, you know. More scope and all that."

Mr. Sprott smiled bitterly as his secretary entered with her notebook.

"It won't do, Mr. Field," was his last word. "Stunts, as you call them, and copy-writing need Flair. They aren't everybody's work. Learn to be punctual, and write a good business letter, and talk sense on the telephone; that'll be enough to keep you busy for the next year or so. Good morning. Miss Bruce, take a letter, please.

He leant back as Claude shut the door and began to dictate in an absent-minded snarl.

Claude wandered along the corridor to his own little office, kicked the door open, and went moodily in. He looked out of place among the chromium and pale wood of the fierce modernist furniture, for he had the long narrow head of an eighteenth-century portrait, and he seemed half asleep. His light suit, tea-coloured hair and pale face suggested neither efficiency nor a desire to Get On.

Among his letters was one from a firm of breakfast-food manufacturers, with their trademark stamped at the head of the paper. It was at this that Claude sat staring for nearly half an hour, while his cigarette burned peacefully to ash on the rim of the tray.

* The preparations for the General Election, which began some three weeks later, increased the conversation between those who frequented the Rest in Peace, near Hurling Gap, in Sussex, but did not increase their number. It was a quiet little pub, visited by the same moderate drinkers year in and year out; and Miss Clipper, the landlady's niece and barmaid, often threatened to go off and get a job at Brightbourne, a large and noisy seaside town some eight miles away.

This evening the bar was quiet as usual. It was getting on for seven o'clock. A clear May twilight covered the Downs. Mr. Rose had been in for his glass and gone out again. Now there was a lull until eight o'clock or so, when the men would begin to drift in after their suppers.

Miss Clipper leant her elbows upon the bar, and sighed. Nothing ever 'appens, reflected Miss Clipper. Not what you might call anything, that is. She glanced at the faded face of an old clock which ticked loudly in a corner, sighed again, and took a duster and began flicking spitefully among the bottles.

It was precisely as Miss Clipper began to flick that she heard an unusual noise outside.

Someone was running down the chalk road which led up to Hurling Down.

Miss Clipper heard the footsteps coming nearer and nearer. She glanced at the dark rim of the mighty Down, which she could see against the yellow sky through the window of the Rest in Peace. It's them kids of Dowler's, thought Miss Clipper, flicking. Ought to be in bed.

Suddenly the monotony of which Miss Clipper complained was broken.

The door flew open.

An old man staggered in, waving his arms above his head, and collapsed across the bar, choking.

"Brandy, me dear, brandy," he gasped. "I run all the way from the Gap and I'm near dead. I see an elephant—oh, my dear heart, I see a great hairy elephant nigh as big as a house and I run all the way and I'm near dead."

Miss Clipper drew herself virtuously away from the old man.

"Mr. Mitson," said Miss Clipper, "I'm surprised at you, that I am. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Where've you been? That nasty Red Lion, I suppose; bad beer and worse company. Elephants, indeed!"

Her homily ended in a shriek. Mr. Mitson had gained a point by fainting.

"What's all this?" demanded Mrs. Wilson, landlady of the Rest in Peace, sailing into the bar. "What elephants?"

"Mr. Mitson's dead," announced Miss Clipper, pointing.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Wilson. "He's only fainted. Here, Nellie, get some brandy, and be quick about it."

At the fiery touch of the brandy, shudderingly administered by Miss Clipper while Mrs. Wilson supported him, Mr. Mitson recovered enough to sit up and drain the glass, not without a glance of triumph at the barmaid.

"Now, Mr. Mitson, just you tell us all about it," said Mrs. Wilson comfortably. "You were in a state, weren't you. Have a drop more—well, perhaps, sherry 'ud be better this time. Nellie, get Mr. Mitson a small sherry."

A pause. The sherry was drunk, and Mr. Mitson began to breathe more calmly. He wiped his forehead with a trembling hand and glanced from one concerned face to the other. Miss Clipper still looked a little indignant, but Mrs. Wilson was plainly all agog.

"Well, Mrs. Wilson, me dear, and you, miss," began Mr. Mitson, "I was coming home along from a day's work up at New Hurling in Major Fortescue's garden, rolling his lawn and doing a bit o' pruning and I see an elephant."

He paused, and nodded. The expressions on two faces looking down at him changed a little.

"I see an elephant," repeated Mr. Mitson, more loudly.

"Just as I were coming up by Long Barrow Wood. A great elephant he were, true as I lie here, all over long black hair and he had great big tusks and a trunk as long as this bar, Mrs. Wilson, me dear. And when I see him a standing there, waving his trunk and as big as a house, I were fair horrified and I run all the way down from Hurling Gap wi'out stopping and here I be."

Mrs. Wilson shook her head.

"Now, now, Danny Mitson! Remember you and me have known each other since I was so-high. Don't you come into the Rest in Peace with tales like that. You and your hairy elephants! Liker it was a cow."

"It were an elephant," repeated Mr. Mitson obstinately. "Mind you, I don't say as it were a *real* elephant. Maybe it were a ghost-elephant out of Long Barrow where all them old heathen soldiers is buried. Come to think of it, 'e glided along like a ghost. But I saw him, plain as your hand."

Mrs. Wilson and Miss Clipper exchanged glances, which said, "Poor old man, his wits are failing at last. We must humour him."

"Well, he can't get you now, whatever he was," said Mrs.

Wilson soothingly. "You just sit by the fire and rest a bit, and when Jim Wykes comes in, you can go along home with him. Just you take it easy, now."

She rose from her kneeling position beside the old man, and was holding out her hand playfully to help him rise from the floor, when a gasp from Miss Clipper made her look round.

"Look!" whispered Miss Clipper.

Three pairs of eyes turned towards the long ridge of Hurling Down, black against the fading light, which could be seen through the window.

A vast shaggy shape, enormous even at that distance, passed leisurely across the skyline, swinging a great trunk!

It disappeared beyond the edge of the window; and there was an intense stillness.

Mr. Mitson broke it.

"I told yer so," nodded Mr. Mitson complacently.

"Hooper," said the news editor of the *Morning Star* in the reporters' room of that paper, a week later, "take a run down to Sussex and see if there's anything in this Mammoth story, will you? Don't handle it too seriously, of course. Strike the 'Silly Sussex' note . . . but don't strike it too hard or we shall get let in for a long correspondence with that old ass Sir John Field. He's a nasty customer when he's roused, and he loves Sussex like a father. He's a cert for Brightbourne, too; they've returned him for the last ten years. Don't do too much; half a column at the most. See how it works out."

Hooper, sceptical, but fond of fresh air and looking forward to a day in the country, ran into his young friend Claude Field while he was starting up his car.

"How's Cosmos?" asked Hooper.

Claude shook his head. He was not unlike a fish, decided Hooper, except that fishes had more spine and were not all so elaborately dressed.

"Very irksome. I envy you, Hooper. You do see life, anyway. Where are you beetling off to?"

"Mammoth-chasing," grinned Hooper. "Our correspondent at Brightbourne has sent in a yarn about some local worthies seeing a hairy elephant on the Downs. Marvellous what beer can do, aided by imagination."

Claude looked at him pensively.

"I wonder, Hooper? The Downs are jolly ancient, you know, and all that. Prehistoric and what-not. I shouldn't be at all surprised if there's something in it."

"I should," said Hooper, driving away. "Very."

So it happened that Hooper was responsible for the Great Mammoth Story, which burst over England on the following morning and drove the General Election News off the front page for nearly a fortnight.

Hooper saw the Mammoth.

At least, he saw something more like a mammoth than anything he had ever seen before; a huge dark shape moving across a twilight valley half a mile away, its trunk rooting among the fresh shoots of the furze bushes. He stood on the hillside, staring down into the dusk, suddenly very aware how vast and lonely were the hills rolling on all sides, and how empty the darkening sky.

Suddenly the thing disappeared.

He realized that he was staring at a dark patch of bushes. The moving shape had apparently sunk into the earth.

Hooper hesitated, standing on the hillside and gazing doubtfully down into the dim valley. He knew that he ought to go down there and have a look round. It was his duty, as a newspaper man, to trail the mammoth to its lair and secure the biggest scoop in history. But he did not go, because he was afraid; and he did not mind confessing as much to the scoffing news editor of the *Morning Star* later.

There was a contrast between that bulk, and its stealthy gliding movement which was so strong as to be horrible.

There should have been the noise of tearing undergrowth and cracking branches to accompany the monstrous size of the brute, but there had not been a sound. Like a ghost, thought Hooper, staring down into the valley. It moved like a ghost.

The *Morning Star* splashed his story on the front page with a photograph of a different Sussex valley, explaining that this was the type of country where the Mammoth had been seen.

By the afternoon the evening papers were on the trail, and the Rest in Peace had sold out of gin.

The *Morning Star* was fond of speculating in its columns about probable conditions in the next world; and it took

the Mammoth story from a supernatural angle. It pointed out in a brightly-written leader that mammoths had at one time roamed England from Scotland to Cornwall. There was scarcely a county in England which might not contain their fossilized remains (it was safe to say this, as anyone who wrote in to say that there were no fossilized mammoths in their part of the world could be floored by telling them that their part of the world was one of the few counties where there were no fossilized mammoths). The article ended on a pious "Who knows?" note. The leader writer refrained from quoting Hamlet but afterwards inserted the quotation on a hint from the editor.

This leader brought a letter from Professor Pinchell Wainflete, F.Z.S., B.Sc., Ph.D.

"I cannot say that I am surprised at the *nature* of the article in your paper," wrote the Professor. "I ceased some years ago to be surprised at the nature of *any* item printed by the daily Press. But I must confess that your leader has revealed to me depths which I had hitherto not suspected. I marvel, sir. I stand like a little child, and I marvel. Of all the barbarous, inaccurate, mischievous and positively harmful . . ." etc.

The President of the Spiritists Society, invited by telephone to say what he thought about Professor Wainflete's letter, coughed up handsomely by calling the Professor an old-fashioned materialist. He quoted Sir James Jeans. He also suggested that the Mammoth might be an emanation or earth-bound herd-spirit, given off by some part of the Downs where huge herds of Mammoths had once grazed.

"I don't care if it's Cary Cooper in disguise," crooned the news editor of the *Morning Star*. "This is the best story since that chap killed his wife with a pencil-sharpener."

The Mammoth Story rioted over the front pages of the Press for a fortnight; even *The Times* gave it eight lines at the bottom of a column and a veiled reference in a third leader.

It would not be true to say that people talked about nothing else; but they certainly talked about it a great deal. Society hostesses gave Mammoth Luncheons. Comedians made jokes about it. Mammoth hunting parties were organized and Carr, the famous barman at the Sheridan, invented a new cocktail which he called Tusker.

But Hooper was not satisfied.

He was the only other man in England who had seen the Mammoth; and therefore he was the only man who believed that it was real. Mr. Mitson agreed with the President of the Spiritists Society in believing it to be a ghost. As for Mrs. Wilson and Miss Clipper, they were dismissed as hysterical females who probably imagined things.

Mr. Mitson and Hooper had many a long talk about the Mammoth. Hooper was still down in Sussex, covering the story from that end, and he spent his evenings in the bar of the Rest in Peace.

Mr. Mitson took the Mammoth very seriously indeed. He had temporarily retired on the money earned by two articles signed by himself and entitled: "When I saw the Mammoth" and "The Mammoth: What it Means." These had been judiciously sub-edited by Hooper.

"The Mammoth: What it Means" had been a bit difficult to do because, if the matter were looked squarely in the face, the Mammoth did not seem to mean anything in particular except better trade for the cottages near Hurling which sold teas to motorists. But Hooper had a chat with the President of the Spiritists Society and spent one afternoon in the Natural History Museum and another in the reading-room of the British Museum library; and then turned out an article in a pure yet racy style which was, as even the news editor had to admit, "pure Mitson in his later, and better, manner."

But Hooper was puzzled.

He compared notes with Mr. Mitson, and they agreed that it was queer that the Mammoth should restrict his appearances to the hour of dusk.

"Almost as though he didn't want to be seen," mused Mr. Mitson, who now assumed the airs of a connoisseur in mammoths. "Funny kind of a walk he's got, too. Kind of a glide. Not 'uman, if you come to think of it. But then, come to think of it again, that's only natural."

"Why?" demanded Miss Clipper, polishing a glass.

"Because he *ain't* human," said Mr. Mitson triumphantly.

"Well if you ask me I think its someone playing a joke," said Mrs. Wilson.

No one took any notice of this.

Three nights later two young men, driving home across

the Downs after a party in Seacove, saw the Mammoth by bright moonlight, "tossing its trunk in the air as though it were playing." They telephoned the *Morning Star* just as the paper was going to bed, and the front page lay-out had to be altered. The General Election news was huddled into a corner. England awoke to read of "Mammoth At Play on the Downs by Moonlight." In the lunch edition of the evening papers this had changed to "Mammoths Moonlight Gambol on Downs."

But Hooper, lounging in the bar of the Rest in Peace, was shaking his head. The Mammoth Story had gone just a little too far. Hooper smelt a rat, and fancied he knew its name.

He was studying a paragraph from a London paper's gossip column which stated that Sir Sam Range, the famous big game-hunter, had taken Hurling House near Mammoth Wood (as Long Barrow Wood was now called) for the season.

"Is this mighty hunter hoping to get a pot at the Mammoth?" archly demanded the gossip-writer.

Hooper slipped the cutting into his pocket-book, and glanced out through the window at the slowly darkening sky.

"A perfect Mammoth evening," thought Hooper. "I think I'll run up and see Sir Sam about the possibilities of a mammoth-shooting season on the South Downs."

But when Hooper arrived at Hurling House he was not pleased to find a fellow-newspaperman, Jorrocks of the *Comet*, standing at the gate, silently listening to Sir Sam Range giving instructions to a couple of game-keepers who carried rifles. Sir Sam was armed with a heavier type of gun.

He glanced round as Hooper approached, and made a brief sign of welcome. He knew the reporter fairly well, who was himself a fair shot, as Hooper had interviewed him several times.

Hooper looked coldly at Jorrocks.

"We're going mammoth-hunting," murmured Jorrocks. "All of us. I came up here on the trail of that paragraph in the *Clarion* and walked into this peach of a story. Hooper . . . when I think that if I had been half an hour later I should have missed it, I almost believe in God."

Hooper looked at him with distaste, and asked where they were to begin the search for their quarry?

"By Long Barrow Wood, I understand, where old Mitson first saw the brute . . . or thought he did. Oh, beg pardon, you saw it too, of course, didn't you? Sir Sam and the keepers are going to fire at sight. And if we don't see anything to-night we're coming out every night until we do see something."

"Will he mind the publicity?"

"He'll eat it. And think of the kudos for him if he shoots the first mammoth on English soil."

Hooper studied Jorrocks in silence, then shook his head.

"If you're not careful," he said kindly, "you'll find yourself seeing the Mammoth, too."

The light had almost gone by the time the little party reached Long Barrow Wood. They approached Long Barrow itself from the wood side, so that the great mound was visible against the skyline between the trunks of the trees.

"If he's anywhere, he's about here somewhere," breathed Sir Sam as they cautiously entered the wood, "and this is the time to get him. The light couldn't be worse for shooting, of course, but he's big enough to hit at a mile if the stories are true."

They paused among the last thin barrier of trees before the wood ended, full in face of Long Barrow itself.

"Now we'll lie down," whispered Sir Sam, "and wait. There's nothing else to be done. The odds are a million to one against our seeing anything, of course. Still, now we're here, we may as well stay."

Contempt, scepticism and excitement were oddly mixed in his low, grumbling tones. He settled himself among the undergrowth with the noiselessness of an old hunter, and the other men did the same.

They had been waiting perhaps three quarters of an hour, and Hooper was beginning to feel that he must smoke or shriek, when Jorrocks put out his hand stealthily and touched Sir Sam's arm.

Against the shadows, no more than a deepening of their darkness, another shadow was nearing up, between the watchers and the Long Barrow!

It was an enormous bulk, moving with a peculiar gliding motion.

There was not a sound. Not a leaf stirred.

Jorrocks felt the hair rising on his scalp as the enormous shadow began to move slowly up Long Barrow towards the skyline, and he saw a long trunk swaying before it, and the glimmer of its tusks.

Sir Sam was shaking with excitement. He wormed his way forward, followed by the others, until they left the trees behind them and were advancing over the turf towards the Barrow, towering black and ominous against the sky.

But Hooper, who was the least moved of the party, was listening hard as they advanced to catch a peculiar intermittent creaking noise which seemed to come from the direction of the mighty shadow.

It was exactly like the whine of an unoiled wheel.

And surely there was a peculiar stiffness about the lower part of the brute's body? The legs scarcely seemed to move; the bulk jerked, rather than glided, over the ground.

It was now towering on the twilight skyline scarcely fifty feet away.

Hooper's reflections were cut short by the splitting report of Sir Sam's rifle, followed, before the echoes had stopped tearing through the wood, by a second and a third.

"Fire, you fools, fire!" yelled Sir Sam, running forward (with insane courage, considering the situation) and the keepers, scarcely stopping to take aim, obeyed.

If the Mammoth doesn't get us the keepers will, thought Hooper, dodging a bullet.

Then he saw an amazing sight.

The upper part of the Mammoth's body was shrinking!

Even as they advanced, encouraged by the curious stillness of that enormous shape, the great body collapsed between the pedestals of the legs with a long, sustained whistling sound like that made by escaping air.

"Fooled!" exclaimed Sir Sam grimly, and his torch flashed over the legs of painted canvas mounted on collapsible wire hoops, mounted on a wheeled stand. Between them sagged the body of black balloon silk, hung with coarse black hair.

"The biggest practical joke of the century, by gad! Look—" he smartly struck one of the legs with the butt of

his gun, "they collapse at a touch. You could pack the thing into a side-car."

But Hooper had seen something else—the figures of two men running like hares across the dim turf towards the Hurling road, and with a shout he set off in pursuit, followed by the two keepers.

"Take a look at this, will you?" demanded Sir Sam, pursuing investigations with his torch.

"This" was a placard slung across the Mammoth's shapeless forehead.

"EAT MAMMOTH WHEATNUTS AND VOTE FOR
SIR JOHN FIELD."

And across the bottom of the placard :

"This is a Cosmos Advertisement."

Hooper, after a fierce chase and a battle, found himself sitting on the chest of his young friend Claude Field.

"You great fool, it's me," said Claude coldly. "Let me get up, can't you."

"I thought as much," said Hooper. "As soon as you and young Brabazon sent in that pretty tale about the Mammoth playing ball by moonlight, I began to wonder."

"Get off my bosom, you big piece of cheese, and I'll tell you all about it."

There was not much to tell. The Great Mammoth Story was rapidly dwindling into prose: and the story of how young Claude revived the Edwardian mania for practical joking on a Homeric scale, and won his small but secure place in the records of the social historians is another story, spread over many years.

"Brabazon and I made Belisha (that's his name) in Brabazon's studio in Brightbourne. It was quite easy for us to slip out in the evening in the car, wait till it got dark, and then blow Belisha up. He was as easy to pull along as a toy motor-car; you just got behind one of his legs and hauled away. It was child's play. Honestly, I never thought it would go down half as well as it has."

He paused. They were strolling back towards the forlorn, deflated mass of silk and hair that was Belisha.

Brabazon had escaped the keepers, and driven off in Claude's car.

"You see," pursued Claude, "I was tired of being told at Cosmos that I couldn't think up stunts. I hope this will show the people there that I'm not cut out for routine."

He paused again. When he spoke again his tone was a little less complacent.

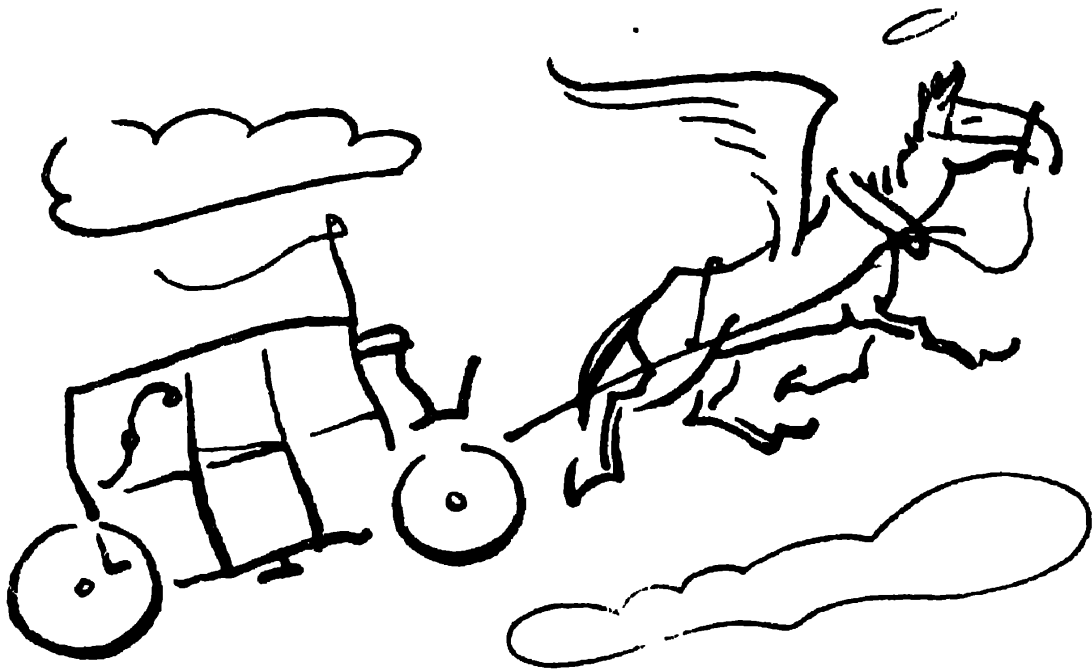
"It's just father I'm thinking about, as a matter of fact. He may think it an undignified way of securing votes."

He sighed.

"Older people are so amazingly rabid about their dignity, aren't they? Oh well . . . it was a good stunt, though I says it as shouldn't."

And thus ended the Great Mammoth Story.

HOMING JANE



BEN TRAVERS

BEN TRAVERS is the author of many novels and short stories, but the field in which he has won an international reputation is in drama of the lighter kind. He wrote those famous Aldwych plays *A Cuckoo in the Nest*, *Rookery Nook*, and many others which have had long runs.

HOMING JANE

I

AFTER four long years he returned to her. And at his coming she veiled her face from him. He was Maurice Wincott, from Ceylon ; she, his mother city. And even as he stepped from the train London wrapped herself in the shrouds of a thick November fog.

He deliberately accepted the challenge of the grumpy old metropolis. He booked a room at an hotel and indulged in a very prolonged and very warm bath. In this he reclined, lazily replenishing the hot-water supply with his big toe and forming dreamy plans for an enjoyable evening.

The first essential, of course, was company. Now who was there in London—excluding, naturally, relations and men ? Was there no one he could discover and lug out to dinner—no pleasing female acquaintance of the past ? And suddenly, in the bathroom vapours of luxurious indetermination, gleamed the half-forgotten features of Belle Bellamy.

Belle Bellamy, good Lord, yes !

He hadn't heard of her for four years, but she might still be living in that converted maisonette in those mews—No. 1 Something Mews, Knightsbridge. He left the bath and returned to his bedroom, where he ransacked a telephone directory.

Alas ! there were no Miss Bellamys in mews. He tried what Miss Bellamys there were, but none of them was Belle. He would gladly, in his growing desperation, have struck up a chance acquaintance with any other of the Miss Bellamys and taken her to dinner, had she but known. But not one of the Miss Bellamys appeared to guess this.

Well, he'd have to go and investigate, that was all. He'd dress and find his way to the mews.

II

At No. 1 Radnor Mews, Knightsbridge, Mr. Percival Thurlowe was in his dressing-room. His mirror reflected strange contortions of his plump face. He was battling with a white tie, and before him, propped against the hair-brush, was a leaflet of illustrated instructions in the correct tying of white ties, a stroke of commercial genius which has resulted in the destruction of thousands of white ties and the subsequent purchase of thousands more.

Mr. Thurlowe, a man of fifty-five and capable of moments of strong passion, finally tore the tie from his collar and clenched it in a quivering fist. A very regrettable expression *re* white ties boiled to his lips.

This despairing toilet cry brought in his wife, who tied the tie for him and encouraged him into his tail-coat. He was dressing to attend a City banquet with the Worshipful Company of Flannel Vendors, but by this time he was grumbling against his tie, the fog and the very overrated pastime of banqueting in general. At which did the wife, who was only about half his age and little more than a bride, joyfully acquiesce and urge him to remain and keep her company? She did not.

"I should make an early start," she said, and she called to the maid below: "Florence, get a taxi!"

"No, Florence!" cried the husband. "A taxi! All the way to the City? Think of the fare."

"There are no taxis left in the mews, madam," reported Florence. "Only the old man at the far end with the horse-cab."

"You needn't think I'm going to drive to the City in that broken-down cab."

"Then take the Underground," said Mrs. Thurlowe.

• She bore him to the front door, where he stood and scented the heavy atmosphere with foreboding.

"You'll stay in to-night, mind," he said. "I won't have you going over to Eileen's on a night like this."

Eileen, who supplied Cora Thurlowe with a permanent excuse for evening excursions, was her stepdaughter, a girl in the early twenties, who occupied two rooms in a neighbouring block of flats and performed secretarial work by day.

This made her too tired to visit the maisonette after working hours ; so Cora would frequently pop over and see Eileen. Percival didn't mind much so long as she walked and didn't squander a shilling on a taxi.

Cora closed the front door on her gloomily-departing spouse and hastened back to the telephone. To inform Eileen that she had been bidden to remain within doors ? Not at all. To ask to speak to a Mr. Morris.

"If," says the French phrase-book in a passage of inspired philosophy, "if one is not beautiful it is admirable to be good." So, presumably, as one deviates from the strait and narrow path of utter virtue one may be expected to gain proportionately in good looks. Cora could not be termed actually beautiful, and she was by no means immoral. What perhaps robbed her of beauty was a certain piquancy of expression ; you know, that cheekily-tilted nose typical of some of our merry blondes whom gentlemen prefer. And a corresponding germ of mischief in her nature may have beckoned her occasionally from the stony path of rigorous probity to the smoother tracks of fun—though, indeed, she never wandered very far afield.

But fun has its reckoning ; in this instance the payee being this Mr. Morris. As Cora discoursed with him on the telephone that attractive smile which telephoning persons assume automatically—as though it could be observed by the interlocutor—played on her lips ; but her eyes were widened and seemed to stare through the wall opposite at some visionary menace beyond.

"I know I said I'd pay to-night ; but I can't. You shall have the money to-morrow, or quite soon . . . No, you can't possibly see my husband. He's out to-night ; besides, he doesn't know about it, and if he did . . . What ? Mr. Morris, you wouldn't do a thing like that ! . . . I know ; I know. I thought I could raise it by to-night. I'm sorry, but you shall have it. You can trust me . . . No, you can't see him, you can't. He won't be in till late. Besides, you needn't think you'd get anything out of him . . . Not what ? Not a large sum ? Not to you, perhaps. All the more reason why you can afford to wait a little longer . . . You won't wait ? . . . Hallo ? Hallo ?" But Mr. Morris had rung off.

She sat deep in thought, her fingers tapping an aimless

tune on the table. From somewhere, within the next hour or two, she must raise £300, or Percival would get to hear about it. What should she do? Her bank balance—well, she had had to nip into a taxi only yesterday to avoid meeting her bank manager in the street. Her few securities were in trust—curse this trust business. Who was there?

There was Ella Moone, for instance. She knew Ella well enough to confide in her; but look at the way Ella carried on if she lost half a crown at bridge! Still, Ella might be able to suggest something. Cora titivated hastily before her drawing-room mirror, hurried to the front door, and opened it to peer into the bland, expectant countenance of Maurice Wincott.

"Belle!" he cried. "No. Dash! So sorry. I came to see a lady who lived here. She evidently doesn't. I beg your pardon. A Miss Bellamy. You don't happen to know?"

"Oh, she's gone to live at Brighton, I believe."

"Oh. Sorry. You see, I've been abroad for four years, so I didn't know. This is my first night back in London. What a night for it, isn't it? Well, thank you."

He raised his opera hat and turned, with perhaps just the smallest hint of reluctance, to depart. A well-dressed, well-spoken man with a pleasant, open smile. "Hold him!" cried every instinct in Cora's constitution. "Hold him! This may be your guardian angel unawares. Hold him; take him in and try him out."

"Oh, but now you're here—won't you come in and warm yourself for a moment?" she said.

"Really? Oh, how kind! But you were going out."

"No hurry."

"She led the way back to the little drawing-room and turned to face him again. They inspected each other in the better light with interest and, it appeared, mutual satisfaction. He was a bronzed, clean-shaven man of about forty. Not even the traces of fog could dim the benevolent gleam of admiration in his eyes.

"You know Miss Bellamy?" he asked.

"I met her when we took over the maisonette."

"Yes; a plain—well, a comparatively plain woman, but a kind heart. I came to see her because I couldn't think of anyone else."

"You've only just got back to London, you say?"

"To-day. After four years in Ceylon. And look at London! Gloom and fog. I went out into Piccadilly. I've never felt so lonely in my life. I've been whole days and nights in the jungle with only the monkeys, but I found it twice as sociable as Piccadilly."

"You wanted—company?"

"Company. Exactly. How quick of you!"

"Have a cigarette," said Cora.

"You're more than kind," he said. "I'm getting warmer. Am I keeping you?"

"Not at all."

"What were we saying? Oh, yes—company. Well, you know, everywhere I went in the fog in Piccadilly I saw or encountered couples. Happy little couples—sweethearts and wives—possibly some one's sweetheart who'd fallen in with some one else's wife in the fog—but no matter; anyhow, couples. Well, naturally I didn't feel like spending my first evening alone, so, in lieu of a better, I came to seek out Belle Bellamy."

"And what will you do now?" asked Cora.

"Well, I certainly shan't go to Brighton. I must dine at some lugubrious club, I suppose. And I'd pictured such a delightful little dinner in some lively restaurant; you know—sparkling wines, sparkling eyes—the soothing murmur of the saxophone—all that stuff. But, alas! it is not to be." He sighed and examined the glow of his cigarette. "I suppose," he added wistfully.

She too displayed interest in her cigarette.

"Well, I really don't know what I can do to help you," she said.

"Oh, nothing—naturally, nothing. But you so kindly asked me in and registered sympathy, that's all. You're married, I see."

"Yes. I live here with my husband. He's gone out to a City dinner."

"And left you to dine alone?"

"Yes."

"Oh, why?" He spoke in a whisper so soft that it scarcely seemed more than a part of his smile.

She glanced at him quickly, and he plunged. Told her his name, his circumstances, advertised modestly his

unimpeachable character. Sobering somewhat, paid restrained tribute to her infectious charm and its natural effect on one reclaimed from the rubber plantations.

"You must pardon me," he urged, "but, really, think of my case. For months together I haven't seen a white woman's face. Occasionally, perhaps, a little treat in the shape of a female missionary, and usually a very queer shape too. Well, you ask, how can you help me. And I tell you. You can help me by coming out with me to some tip-top restaurant and having a dashed good dinner."

She crossed to the sofa. He remained standing in the centre of the room, looking like a patient awaiting the verdict of a specialist.

"It's funny," she said, "that anyone should walk in here like this and ask me to help him, because if there's anyone in London who wants help to-night, it's me."

He came deliberately to the sofa and sat beside her. "Come on. Tell me," he said.

"Look here," she replied; "I should think you're a pretty broadminded man."

"Broadminded? I come from the island of Ceylon—a land where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. I tell you, you get broadminded soon enough, living among vile men with pleasing prospects."

"All right, then. Listen . . ."

III

For a stepdaughter, Eileen was certainly a sport. She never let on that Cora's evening visits to her rooms were less frequent and of briefer duration than Percival supposed. Eileen perhaps found it easy to forgive a little harmless recreation to anyone who had married her father. She knew that Cora was wont to look in at Mr. Morris's flat hard by and indulge in a taste for roulette, which Eileen personally considered a particularly footling form of amusement.

Cora, who had met Mr. Morris through her bookmaker, became rather intrigued by the little parties in his rooms. They were admittedly below her social standard. She had lost steadily and had presented Mr. Morris with I O U's. In

short, this was Cora's folly ; just as you and I have doubtless our own little follies carefully guarded and, with any luck, undreamt of at the other end of the dinner-table. Mr. Morris was very suave and hand-lathering about the I O U's at first ; then changed his demeanour. Cora's face when he threatened to apply to Mr. Thurlowe told him that this was a very disagreeable idea to her ; told him, moreover, that the fifth of November would be the most appropriate date for the revelation. So he told Mrs. Thurlowe that unless she paid by the fifth he'd call on her husband. Only he didn't say "your husband." He said "hubby." Well, here was the fifth, and what had Cora done ? Raised what ready money she could and tried to augment it by laying it on a sequence of disappointing racehorses. Such was the sad tale related, without elaboration or apology, to Maurice Wincott as she sat there in the midst of the poor little Jericho maisonette with Joshua Morris already tuning up his trumpet at the gates.

"I've come home with an almost indecent amount of cash," he said. "I'll let you have three hundred if you'll pay me back some time."

"You think," she expostulated, "that I only told you because I wanted you to lend me the money ?"

"Well, yes," he answered obviously.

She looked at him searchingly, almost accusingly ; then relapsed. "Well, so I did," she confessed.

He rose. "Right. I'll wait while you dress. We'll dine. Then we'll call on this blighter and fix him. I've got my cheque-book in my pocket. I half guessed I might want it to-night."

"Twenty minutes ago you'd never heard of me," she said. "You mean to say you'll lend me this money without security ?"

"Yes. I can see exactly the sort of person you are. Of course I'll help you, with pleasure."

"And you mean to say that it's possible for a man to do this for a woman without the faintest glimmer of an ulterior motive ?"

"It is possible," he replied. He looked at her and smiled briefly. "It's difficult, but possible."

Two minutes later she was dressing as light-heartedly as a schoolgirl on an outing. What elation is there in the

world to compare with that which celebrates a menace parried ? It is sufficient to supply a recreant philosopher with a handy excuse for seeking trouble.

IV

At 9.45 Cora brought him into Eileen's two-roomed quarters and introduced him to her—Mr. Wincott, a friend of her youth just returned from Ceylon. Eileen took good stock of him, and liked the look of him very much. As for him, he sat positively staggered by the glory of Eileen, the sweet, graceful creature, with her trimly-shingled brown locks and complexion of peaches.

By George, how delightful these girls appeared after a long sojourn in the sallow East ! Cora could not fail to notice his keen appreciation of Eileen, but she didn't appear to resent it. On the contrary, she rather encouraged it.

The main object of the evening was still to be achieved. They had called at Mr. Morris's, but he was out. There was no party there that night. They must call again, that was all. So they crossed the road to Eileen's rooms to pass the time.

It passed all too quickly for Wincott. At ten o'clock they went out and tried again. No luck ; Mr. Morris had not returned. There was no little roulette party that evening.

"What if he's done what he threatened and gone round to the mews ?" said Cora.

"What if he has ?" replied Wincott. "He won't have found anyone there, and you don't expect a man like that to hang about indefinitely in mews in a fog."

Cora shrugged. "Anyhow, I must get back. Percival will be home soon. Hadn't I better perhaps have the money with me, just in case Morris should turn up ? Then, if he doesn't, I could settle with him to-morrow."

Wincott seated himself on a damp but convenient doorstep with his cheque book and a fountain pen, and presented Cora with £300. Her expressions of gratitude were cut short, for a stray taxi came looming up, and taxis were not easy to find in the fog.

"Are you coming with me as far as the mews ?" she asked.

"You bet I am." ~

"Or would you rather go and take Eileen out to supper?"

"What?" he said quickly.

Cora laughed. "There are not many ways in which I can show my gratitude, but if that's one of them, you carry on."

As he hesitated she stepped into the taxi and stretched a hand out to him through its open doorway. He kissed it. She laughed again and drove away.

There met her, at the maisonette, a distracted Florence.

"Oh, madam, there's a strange man in the drawing-room. He insisted on coming in. Said he had very important business with the master and would wait."

"What? He's really had the cheek? All right," said Cora. "I know about it. I'll see him."

"Oh, but, madam! The master's been back. He came and went again just before this gentleman arrived. He thought you were at Miss Eileen's, and went to fetch you back."

Cora bit her lip. Delicate business, this. "How long ago when he went?"

"About a quarter of an hour'm."

"Did he walk?"

"No'm. He wanted a taxi, but couldn't get one. That old cabman was just starting out looking for a fare in the fog, so he took him."

"Oh, he'll be back pretty soon," said Cora. "All right, Florence."

V

"Righto," said Eileen; "I'm on. We'll go to the Beaux Arts."

"The Beaux Arts," said Wincott. "Splendid! Go into your bedroom and put on your prettiest evening frock. I'll wait here."

For the second time that evening he reclined in a sitting-room while a feminine member of the Thurlowe family performed an adjacent toilet for his benefit. But suddenly there came a sharp rap at the outer door, and a thick masculine voice: "Eileen!"

Eileen appeared from the bedroom. She was not entirely

dressed, but near enough. Her pretty features were puckered in annoyance.

"It's father," she said.

"Does that matter much?" he inquired.

"Not in the least," said Eileen. "Half a tick."

She admitted a study in feasted and massive indignation. His greatcoat was open and flapping. He wore a tall hat at an imperious tilt. His ponderous jaw was working at some private rehearsal of wrathful remonstrance. It dropped, and he blinked in surprised challenge at Wincott, who rose and bowed ceremoniously. "Father, I believe?" he said.

"Who the devil is this man, and what's he doing here, and where is your mother, and what are you in this half-clad condition for?" demanded Mr. Thurlowe.

"Mr. Wincott, from Ceylon. Because he's going to take me out to supper. Gone home. Because you can't go to the Beaux Arts in a blouse," replied Eileen patiently.

"I was told your mother was here. What's she been up to? And what are you up to with this man?"

"Now, now, now," said Wincott soothingly. "Finish your dressing. Leave father to me."

Eileen assented and withdrew. Wincott led the protesting parent to the sofa.

"Now, don't you worry about me," he said. "I'm a fine feller. So are you, I'm sure. Only just at the moment you're feeling—well, I know what it is; I've been through it myself. Only last time I was on leave I dined with the Worshipful Company of Milkmen. I remember it well. We all went home with each other."

"You insinuate that I'm drunk?"

"Drunk? No, certainly not; not—not quite. But you mustn't trot about around town in a fog worrying about people. Do let me advise you to go home to bed."

• "Who are you, and how dare you——"

"I'm only trying to do you a kindness, sir. I ask you, look at yourself. Look at your tie—well, you can't, I suppose; but I mean, for instance, look here—what's this on your trousers? Horrible! A piece of pineapple."

"I'm ready," said Eileen, reappearing.

"I forbid you to go out with this man, whoever he is!" cried Mr. Thurlowe.

"Nonsense," said Eileen. "He's a very nice man, as

far as I know ; and even if he isn't, I've enough sense to be able to look after myself."

She escorted Wincott away. Mr. Thurlowe remained on the sofa and drew a podgy hand across his brow.

The fog had doubled in intensity—a deepening blackness had stolen into it, shrouding everything outside a few yards radius.

"We shall never find a taxi," said Eileen.

"Something's standing here," said Wincott. "I see lights."

He advanced a step or two to the kerb. "Here, I say, can you— Oh, good Lord, I'm talking to a horse!"

"Engaged," said something in the darkness.

"But where? I can't find you. Is this you? With a beard? No, that's the other end of the horse." An aged cabman floated into their ken.

"Can't take yer, sir. I brought a gent here from Radner Moos."

"Father's cab," said Eileen. "That's all right. We'll take it on. He'll walk home."

"Ah, but he said 'Wait,'" said the cabman.

"Oh, but we're all in the family," replied Wincott. "Here you are. Here's your fare for bringing him here. Now take us to the Beaux Arts."

"The bazaar?"

"No, no; the Beaux——"

"Rupert Street," said Eileen, already inside the cab.

The cabman, somewhat reassured by five shillings, slowly turned his horse.

"I suppose your old horse can get there?" asked Wincott.

"Old Jane," replied the cabman, "she be better than any o' they taxis in a fog. But, you know, sir, that other gent, 'e said 'Wait.'"

"You're through with him, I tell you. Come on, now. Wake Jane up and urge her to the Beaux Arts." He got in beside Eileen and closed the door. "Are you as comfortable as possible?" he inquired. "I would suggest you sit fairly close, if only on account of the cold."

The cabman mounted; but before Jane had gone a dozen paces he heard the voice of his ex-fare hailing him in no measured terms. Perplexed, he whoa'd Jane, slid from the box and returned to the pavement to argue the matter.

While he was yet searching, a group of overgrown boys, fresh from some fifth of November spree, passed Mr. Thurlowe, jostling him in a very offensive manner. A few yards farther on they discovered an invaluable butt for their humour in the form of an apparently derelict growler. Jane, with a cracker leaping and exploding astern of her, awoke in earnest and lunged away into obscurity.

"We're off at last," said Wincott.

The fog surged against the cab windows. In complete darkness they jogged contentedly along for some considerable time. Suddenly, and apparently for good, the cab came to rest. Maurice opened the door and peered out. He hailed the cabman, who made no reply. He turned with a puzzled smile to Eileen.

"Is this the Beaux Arts?" he asked.

"It doesn't look like it," said Eileen, descending.

VI

"You mean," said Cora, "you won't accept this cheque?"

"Not like it is now," said Mr. Morris. "Your clever friend, whoever he is, has drawn it to 'self' and forgotten to endorse it."

Cora took the cheque, examined it with a frown, and replaced it in her handbag.

"Well, leave it till to-morrow. I'll get it endorsed."

"No," said Mr. Morris. "I'm through with all this, Mrs. Thurlowe. Broken promises—useless cheques—no thanks. I'm going to wait and see your husband."

"You needn't think you'll get a penny out of him."

Mr. Morris, five feet three inches of flaccid self-possession, eyed her dully.

"Go on," he retorted. "Why not admit straight out you'd give anything for hubby not to be told."

Her pride rose in a wave of indignation.

"So I would," she said. "But he's got to be told, that's all. Now you can get out, please."

"I shall only wait on the doorstep if I do," replied Mr. Morris.

She hesitated. After all, she'd better see Percival first

and try to make what explanation she could. "All right, stay where you are," she said.

The imperturbable Mr. Morris complied, and so they remained, he in the drawing-room, she in the dining-room, trying vaguely to formulate her unhappy confession.

At length she looked up quickly. She heard the sound of the cab returning to the mews outside. She rose and stood in the hall waiting for Percival to enter.

Whole minutes passed, and he made no appearance. Finally, unable to bear the suspense, she stepped forward and opened the front door. Again, like a recurring dream, in that doorway appeared Maurice Wincott, wearing an expression of bewildered amusement.

"Shall we come in," he asked, "Eileen and I? The most amazing thing has happened. We took father's cab. The cabby must have fallen off the box. And Jane homed."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You've heard of a homing pigeon?" he replied. "Well, Jane is a homing horse. She homed through the fog to the mews."

"Blessings on Jane!" exclaimed Cora. "Because this is the one place in all the world where you're really wanted at this moment."

Wincott and Eileen followed her into the dining-room. Five minutes later he opened the drawing-room door and confronted the intruder.

"Impossible!" he was saying as he entered. "My wife guilty of such a thing—incredible! Are you this man?"

"Yes, Mr. Thurlowe. Sorry to have to cause a little flutter in the home circle."

"But it's a lie. It's unbelievable. What proof have you got?"

Mr. Morris produced his I O U's with a flourish. Wincott received them with trembling fingers. He moaned aloud as he examined them. "My heavens!" he murmured. "My wife!"

Cora hovered in the doorway. He rounded upon her.

"All this money!" he cried. "Oh, you wicked woman! Oh, you rotten player!"

Then with a sudden gesture of loathing he cast the slips of paper into the back of the fire.

"Get out!" he said, and indicated the door very unmistakably to Mr. Morris.

That gentleman raised a hand, less in protest than in defiance.

"Look here—" he began.

"No," said Wincott. "You look at me. You ran this beastly little roulette table and held the bank, and advanced my poor wife money to lose to you. Every bob you lent her you scooped back. You're not out of pocket a cent. And if you don't get out I shall have to kick you out. And then I shall ring up the police and report you for running a gaming saloon, you naughty little man."

"I handed you those I O U's in good faith," cried Mr. Morris.

"Oh, ridiculous! You haven't any good faith to hand anyone anything in. Run away, now."

Mr. Morris, for once thoroughly roused, was not to be so easily ejected. It took over ten minutes to get him into the outer mews. The door had finally been closed upon him, and he was venting a few farewell threats as he departed, when he butted into the stomach of a stout gentleman who was being accompanied home by a cabless cabman. Mr. Morris was, however, in small temper for apology and explanation.

"Keep it to yourself," he snarled, "can't you?" And he disappeared, fortunately, into the fog and was no more seen.

Percival Thurlowe unlocked and opened his front door. Then he stood back heavily on the toe of the cabman. His whole countenance seemed slowly to open. His opera hat fell with a thud.

"You!" he cried. "Again! Here?"

Wincott advanced to meet him. The staring cabman supported himself by the doorpost and quoted a brief passage of Holy Writ.

Then Mr. Thurlowe saw his wife leaving the drawing-room with Wincott, and swept forward across the narrow hall.

"Who and what is this infernal person?" he began. But she made so horrified a gesture that he paused.

"Really, Percival! Don't be so rude. How can you? This is a very old friend of mine, home from Ceylon. He came in just after you left to-night. He's been entertaining us most liberally."

"But he took my cab——"

"Naturally. He had Eileen to look after in the fog."

"But he left the cabman behind. Oh, what the devil is all this about?"

"Hush!" said Cora. "You can't be yourself. Come in and sit down quietly."

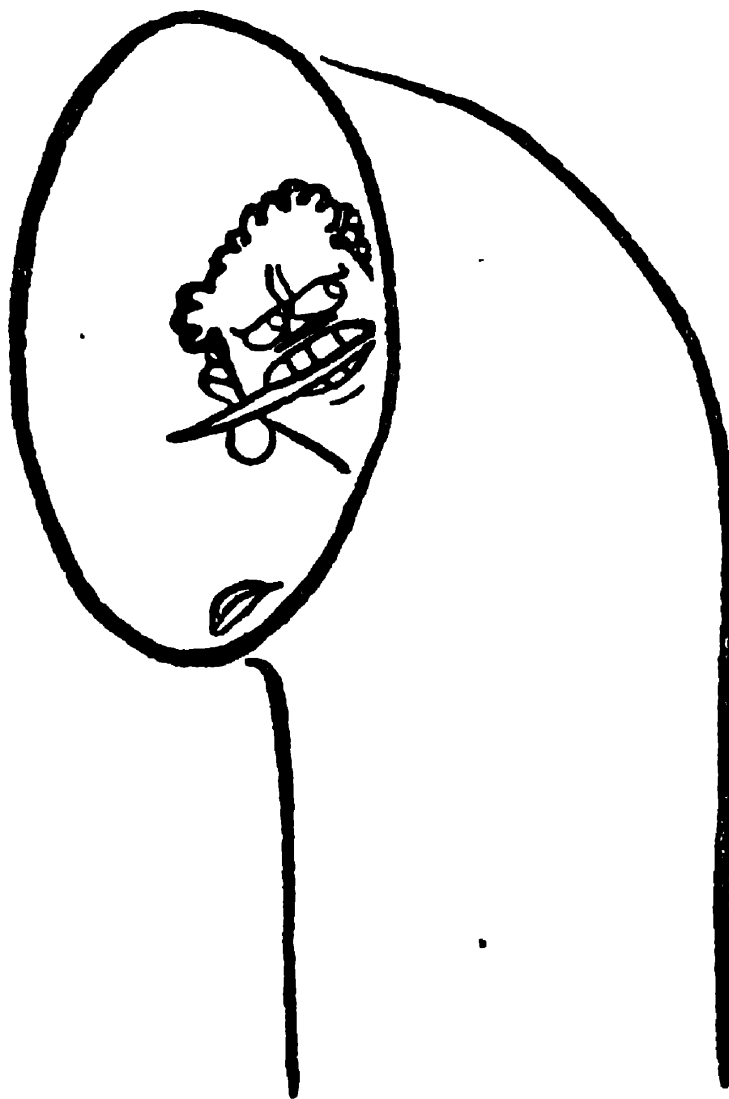
"Shan't we be going now?" suggested Eileen, emerging from the dining-room.

"Certainly," replied Wincott. "Come, cabman; pull yourself together! And tell Jane that this time we really must go to the Beaux Arts."

He glanced back into the drawing-room. Mr. Thurlowe had once more gained the welcome sanctuary of a sofa, where he sat with his ponderous cheeks buried in his hands. Cora raised her head from her ministrations and blew a good night kiss into the hall.

Wincott returned it; then took the waiting arm of Eileen. As he passed out he linked up the still completely staggered cabman with his free arm and bore him down the length of the mews to Jane.

JUST BETWEEN SHIPMATES



GUY GILPATRIC

In his first book *Scotch and Water*, GUY GILPATRIC, with his rollicking creation "Muster Glencannon" of the *Inchcliffe Castle*, immediately jumped into a leading place among our younger humorous writers. In *Half-Seas Over*, his second book, from which the following story is taken, we meet that shrewd Scotchman again, and *Just Between Ship-mates* will show how humorous he can be.

JUST BETWEEN SHIPMATES

THE Italian Peninsula, as everyone knows, is shaped in the profile of one of those gilded wooden boots which identify shops of the Caesars' cobbling sons throughout the cities of the world. The heel of this boot is Cape Santa Maria di Leuca, its sole is the southern coast of Calabria, and its arch is the Gulf of Taranto, a body of water customarily churned to a lather by the Italian Royal Navy in its manœuvres against fictitious hostile fleets, of which, with boundless verve and valour, it immolates as many as six at a time.

One sunny blue morning in November, a cargo steamer was wheezing along southwestward beneath the boot's great arch, serene as a bug which has just escaped being crushed on a pavement. This vessel was the *Inchcliffe Castle*, of London, but so altered was her appearance that you would scarcely have recognized her. Ever since leaving Pola, which is up near the tip of Istria, the *Inchcliffe's* crew had been scaling her with hammers, scrubbing her with soojie, and coating her with paint, until now she looked neat, clean, and to a tolerant eye, respectable. The finishing touches had just been applied, and the Bosun was escorting the Chief Officer over the ship with the flustered air of an academician towing a duchess around a *vernissage*.

"Well, it ayn't 'arf bad," declared Mr. Montgomery as he ran an approving eye along the immaculate white superstructure. "I'll tell yer wot, Hughes, if them stingy swine in the h'office wouldn't orlw'ys go cutting our paint requisitions in two, we could keep the old 'ooker looking like a yacht."

"Ah, indeed we could!" sighed Hughes wistfully. "Oi'm only hoping now, Sorr, thot t' paint'll droy before we stroikes bod weather, or before them ash cats below go stoking her so's she'll get all sooted up, loike."

"Yus, soot would certainly ryse the deuce with 'er," agreed the Mate. "I'll 'ave to speak to Mister Glencannon about it."

"Aye, but I'll speak to ye feerst, and that richt the noo!" came an irate voice from around the corner of the deckhouse. "Foosh, Muster Mate, and what hae ye got to say to this?"

The Engineer appeared in his shirt-sleeves, waving on high like a banner a jacket profusely smeared with white.

"Wet paint!" he fumed. "Wet paint here, wet paint there, wet paint all over the whole dom ship! Can ye ne'er lairn to let weel enough alone, Muster Montgomery, or must ye forever hae a' hands fuddling aboot wi' paint pots, mucking things up? Look at the sorra state to whuch ye've brocht my brond new jocket!"

Mr. Montgomery surveyed the garment, and, having audibly collected his liquid resources, expectorated over the rail. "Well," he said, "wot about it? 'Aven't yer got wit enough to st'y clear of fresh paint? Yus, and while we're on the subjick, just wot the 'ell do yer mean by rubbing yerself agynst the 'ole ruddy ship and messing up my brand new paint-work?"

Mr. Glencannon dashed his jacket to the deck and shook his fist across it. "Oh, horns o' the deevil!" he stormed. "Sae ye're oot to add insoolt to injury, are ye, ye tin-chinned Cheapside cockney?"

"'Oo're yer calling cockney?" demanded Mr. Montgomery, struggling out of his coat and hurling it down upon that of Mr. Glencannon. "Why, see 'ere, gor blyme, I'll barsh the narsty fyce of any Scotch tinker 'oo dares to call me cockney!"

"Ah, so?" said Mr. Glencannon, thrusting out his jaw. "Weel, here's one Scottish face ye'll attempt to bosh at yere deadly peril, Sir! Tak' a guid look at it whilst ye may, for 'tis the last thing ye'll see upon this airth!"

As the pair squared off, the delighted Hughes mentally offered himself seven-to-five on Mr. Montgomery; but chancing to observed the handle of a monkey wrench protruding from Mr. Glencannon's hip pocket, he hastily shifted the odds ten-to-one the other way. Well, any second, now, and the carnage would begin. . . .

Suddenly, above the soft scuffle of feet, the swish of the breeze through the funnel stays, and beat of the engines below, there came a new sound—a head-filling drone which throbbed upon the eardrums like the surging pulse of apoplexy. On the bridge, somebody shouted. A great shadow

sped over the three hundred and fifty feet of the *Inchcliffe Castle's* length, and down to the water beside her swept a seaplane almost as large as the vessel herself. It landed in a series of bounces which threw white clouds of spray high into the air, and finally came to rest a quarter of a mile off the *Inchcliffe's* starboard bow. From one of the twenty motors arranged in pairs along the top of the huge wing, flames and black smoke were pouring; but even before way was off her, a dozen mechanics had scurried up from the wing hatches and were stripping the motor nacelle, squirting extinguishers upon the blaze, and beating it out with their kapok life-jackets.

Messrs. Glencannon and Montgomery, secretly much relieved by this interruption, exchanged a final salvo of horrid snorts; the mate went hurrying up the bridge ladder after Captain Ball, while Mr. Glencannon joined the excited group at the rail.

"Great swith!" he exclaimed. "Yonder floats the most munstrous bird o' its species I've e'er beheld!—An Eyetalian naval plane, judging fra' the red-white-and-green on the rudder o' it."

By this time the *Inchcliffe Castle* had swung off her course and was headed for the seaplane. Mr. Glencannon bethought him of his camera, and was turning away to fetch it when the two abandoned jackets caught his eye. The sight gave him pause. He picked up the Mate's spruce garment, bundled it into a wad, and with it scrubbed approximately two square yards of wet paint from the cowl of a ventilator. Then he spread it upon the deck and very carefully stamped upon its eight brass buttons until they were as flat as so many pennies, albeit a trifle lopsided.

"There, noo!" he chuckled. "Pairhops that will teach him the ruddiments o' eetiquette, and wean him away fra' his spit-and-polish mania for destroying peace aboard ship!" And tossing his own jacket over his arm, he continued aft.

In his room, he went about loading his camera. He heard the *Inchcliffe Castle's* engines rung off, and the squeaking of the blocks as the starboard lifeboat was lowered. By the time he emerged upon deck, this boat, with Mr. Montgomery at the steering oar, had crossed the narrow strip of water that separated ship and seaplane.

With all its motors stopped, the flying giant was rolling

majestically in the swell, and the Mate and his oarsmen were gazing in wonder at the massive wing, so new and shiny, which hung above their heads like the roadway of Tower Bridge. The fire was extinguished now, but the reek of leaking motor-fuel was heavy upon the air.

"H'airyoplyne ahoy!" Mr. Montgomery hailed. "Do yer need a 'and? Do yer want any 'elp?"

"No," snapped a voice from the streamlined conning tower which jutted from the turtle-back abaft the great stubby bow. "Go away at once."

Mr. Montgomery looked up and saw a swarthy gentleman in a pale blue uniform, the left breast of which was graced with gold pilot's wings and four rows of ribbons. There were gold oakleaves on the visor of his cap. "Go away," this officer repeated angrily. "Do not to interfere. Go away, I tell you!"

Mr. Montgomery's jaw dropped in pained surprise, but he instantly recovered himself. "Oh, so that's yer gratitude, is it? Why blarst yer eyes, look 'ere!" he retorted. "Yer on the 'igh-seas now, you ill-mannered squid-eating Dago, and Britannia rules the wyves, don't yer never fergit it! Fer bleddy tuppence"—he thumped the resounding cork breast of his lifebelt—"Fer bleddy tuppence I'd come aboard yer ugly flying swill-barge and . . ."

He was interrupted by shouts and the pounding of feet upon the wing overhead. The mechanics were pointing toward the *Inchcliffe Castle*, and raising indignant outcry. The cause of their excitement was Mr. Glencannon, who still in cap and shirtsleeves was levelling his camera over the rail.

The Italian commander leaned far out of his porthole and waved his arms. "No photo, no photo!" he screamed. "Photo prohibit! You officer weeth white shirt! Stop, stop, I say you!"

Mr. Glencannon snapped the shutter and looked up with an austere frown. "Oh, do be quiet, ye impairment garlicky barber!" he admonished.

With an oath, the commander ducked back into his conning tower. The lifeboat crew could hear him shouting orders. Another officer appeared and trained binoculars upon Mr. Glencannon.

An excited voice within the cabin was repeating the same words over and over again, like a formula.

"Why, 'e's calling for 'elp by wireless telephone!" announced Mr. Montgomery. "Listen there—'e's got through to 'em now, and is telling 'em 'is tyle of woe. Haw, strike me if I ever 'eard such chatter! It sounds like a zoo full of them gaudy purple-sterned kangerangoutangs!"

There came a throaty blast from the *Inchcliffe Castle's* whistle. On the bridge, Captain Ball was beckoning the lifeboat back to the ship. The oarsmen gave way, and Mr. Montgomery brought her alongside smartly. The painter was thrown, and the falls hooked on. "Set taut!" called Mr. Montgomery to Mr. Swales, who was in charge on deck. "Right-o, 'oist aw'y!"

The boat had scarcely been swung inboard on her davits when one of the deckhands swore and pointed astern. There, a few hundred yards to windward, six destroyers were charging in line-ahead formation. They were doing 35 knots, and as they sliced through the swell, sheets of white water came curling out from their concave bows like pine-shavings from a chisel.

"Ah, lovely!" murmured Mr. Glencannon, winding in another film. "If yon Dagoes will only trot oot their submarines and bottleships noo, I'll hae snopshots o' their whole dom navy!"

But suddenly, as the leading destroyer overhauled the *Inchcliffe Castle*, dense torrents of black smoke came crawling and tumbling out of her funnels, looking, in the instant, for all the world like bloated greasy worms. Abruptly the five other craft followed suit. As the wind caught their smoke, mingled it, spread it, and dragged it like a quilt across the *Inchcliffe Castle*, the sky vanished, the sun was blotted out, and lo, at high noon there was darkest night.

Mr. Glencannon stood his ground for a moment, and then, coughing and strangling, he groped his way to his room and slammed the door. Mr. Montgomery, still in his life-belt, went storming up and down the decks, tripping over obstacles and screaming futile curses into the Stygian gloom.

"Our paint!" he raged. "Good lawks, yer've ruined the 'ole job, yer treacherous soot-slinging beggars, yer!"

His feet became entangled in something soft, and he went sprawling. Dragging the object close to his eyes, he saw that it was a paint-smear uniform jacket.

"There!" he snarled, "It's orl 'is fault, 'im and 'is blarsted

camera!—Get us caught in a smoke-screen, would he? Well, by cripes, I'll learn him!" and whirling the garment thrice above his head, he cast it far out into the smoke-smothered sea.

II

The *Inchcliffe Castle*, currently and by long odds the filthiest vessel afloat, was tied up alongside the Quai Papacino, in the Port Lympia of Nice. Her winches were grinding, and a gang of French and Algerian stevedores were working below as the derricks lowered great casks of wine into the holds. Endless ranks of these casks were arranged upon the wharf, and as the noon sun beat down upon them, they gave off a smell that was at once sour, stuffy and sickening, like the air in a Leningrad tramcar.

Mr. Montgomery, a picture of melancholy, was standing on the quai gazing up at the vessel. "Oh, wot a rotten shyme!" he groaned. "Not a clean spot on 'er the size of a chilblain. Yus, and the blarsted soot 'as 'ardened right into the paint!"

"—A charming little harbour, isn't it?"

Mr. Montgomery turned and saw a venerable English gentleman, red of face and kindly of eye, standing beside him surveying the scene. "The hills, the colours—" The stranger waved a gold-headed malacca stick, "The gem of all France, I'd call it."

"Oh, and would yer?" grunted Mr. Montgomery, his thoughts still on soot.

"I would indeed!" said the old gentleman, limping nearer and extending a morocco cigar-case with a crest done in platinum. "Yes, and this ship, this—er—*Inchcliffe Castle*, so perfectly rounds out the picture. A typical toiler of the sea!"

"Well," said Mr. Montgomery, melting a trifle and accepting a cigar, "she looks like a toiler in a 'Indu burning-ghat just now, if you should arsk me. I'm orlmost ashymed to h'admit that I serve on 'er."

"You serve on her!" exclaimed the other. "Ah, fancy! Well, well, how interesting! You're her, ah, captain, perhaps?"

"No," said Mr. Montgomery, "I'm the Chief H'Orfficer."

The old gentleman removed a grey silk glove and offered a cordial hand. "Mister Montgomery," he beamed, "my name is Forsythe-Connor, and I'm very happy to make your acquaintance."

"Yus, er, that is, so'm I," stammered Mr. Montgomery. "But see 'ere, Sir, 'ow does it 'appen that you know my nyme?"

Mr. Forsythe-Connor playfully tapped him on the shoulder with the ferrule of his stick.

"Well," he laughed, "it must seem most mysterious, Mister Montgomery, most mysterious—but before I explain, here's a bit more mystery for you. If you will drive back to the Ruhl and have luncheon with me, I'll take great pleasure in restoring to you your uniform jacket which you lost four days ago. Now, what've you to say to that?"

Mr. Montgomery gasped, swallowed, and pushed his cap to the back of his head. "Why, good lawks . . ." he began.

"Enough!" beamed Mr. Forsythe-Connor. "Follow me!" And with Mr. Montgomery at his heels, he limped shoreward between the rows of wine-barrels.

III

It was in the middle of the afternoon, and in the depths of the *Inchcliffe Castle's* fireroom, Mr. Glencannon was drying several strips of newly printed photographs before a furnace door. As his countenance was illuminated by the glow of the smouldering coals, it looked like that of an alchemist engaged in the distillation of some unholy brew, or even—as Mr. Montgomery decided as he approached through the gloom—like one of those grotesque conceits which the Germans delight to carve upon the bowls of meerschaum pipes and the far ends of fiddles.

At the sound of footfalls, Mr. Glencannon looked up, but recognizing the Mate, he grunted and looked down again.

"See 'ere," said Mr. Montgomery, his voice tense with excitement, "I'd like to talk to you."

"Weel," said Mr. Glencannon, rustling his prints, "I regret that I canna return the compliment. In view o' the recent onpleasantness betwixt us, I . . ."

"Now wyte!" interrupted Mr. Montgomery. "Let bygones be bygones, can't yer? If yer'll only ferget yer silly grudge, 'ere's a chance fer you and I to myke a tidy bit of money."

"How tidy?" inquired Mr. Glencannon, evincing interest.

Mr. Montgomery advanced a step and leaned toward Mr. Glencannon's ear. "Fifty pund h'apiece, that's 'ow tidy!" he answered in a stage whisper.

"Fuffy poonds apiece!" exclaimed Mr. Glencannon. "Fuffy . . . why guid losh, my dear friend, ye can count upon my fullest co-operation! Ye surely didna think that I'd hold a groodge against an auld shipmate, did ye? Come, lad, dismiss yere fears and teel me all about it!"

"Right!" said Mr. Montgomery, with evident relief. "Now listen! I 'ad lunch to-d'y with an old gimp-legged cove nymed Forsythe-Connor 'oo's st'ying at the 'Otel Ruhl. 'E's a retired King's Counsel from London, but 'e 'appens to 'ave stood as godfather to a Dago kid 'oo is now grown h'up to be a 'igh-ranker in the h'Eyetalian navy. It was 'im 'oo was in command of that h'airyoplyne the other d'y. D'yer begin to get the connection?"

"Aye, vaguely," said Mr. Glencannon. "But gae on, gae on, dinna tontalize me!"

"Well," Mr. Montgomery continued, "that there h'airyoplyne was something new and secret, and the h'apple of the Dago navy's h'eye. If any news was to leak h'out h'about it, old Forsythe-Connor's godson would be cashiered, or m'bye h'even get carst into the brig. That's why 'e rysed such a stink when you was tyking them snapshots, and why 'e 'ad that smokescreen layed down and orl."

"Aye, exoctly," nodded Mr. Glencannon. "And I suppose it's also why he's sae onxious the noo to buy yon snopshots at any price."

"'E'll buy 'em for a 'undred quid, like I told yer," declared Mr. Montgomery, licking his lips. "Fifty fer you and fifty fer me."

"H'm," mused Mr. Glencannon, "how vurra romontic! But teel me, Muster Montgomery, how did yere spy friend get i' touch wi' ye, and why did he no' come direct to me?"

"Spy?" scoffed Mr. Montgomery. "Haw, he ayn't no spy! 'E's just a soft-'earted old dotard trying to get a lad out of a jam, and it's really orl very simple. Yer'll recall that

when yer was tyking them photos, yer didn't 'ave no coat on. Neither did I, but I was wearing a lifebelt, so they didn't notice it. Orl they saw through the glarsses was a chap with an H'orfficer's cap and a white shirt tyking h'eighteen pitchers of 'em. They kept count. Lyter on, when they picked h'up my jacket with some of my letters in the pocket, they naturally thought it was me."

"Aye, noturally," nodded Mr. Glencannon. "And did ye tell old Muster What's-his-name that it wasn't?"

"Of course I didn't!" said Mr. Montgomery. "I let 'im go on thinking that I 'ad the pitchers, and I myde an h'appointment to give 'em to 'im in 'is rooms at h'eight o'clock to-night. 'E'd to pay me the 'undred when I deliver 'em."

Mr. Glencannon rose and laid his hand upon the Mate's shoulder. "Muster Montgomery," he said, with a catch in his voice, "I'll mak' no secret o' the fact that there hae been times when ye've tried my patience sorely. But noo, but noo—weel, I must confess ye've won my deepest odmiration."

"Er, haw, well, I 'aven't done so badly at that," admitted Mr. Montgomery. "After all, fifty quid apiece is a nice bit of oof!"

"It is i'deed!" agreed Mr. Glencannon. "But noo, if ye'll excuse me, I must hurry ashore to the bronze foondry, aboot those new bushings. I'll see ye at tea-time."

A shrewd glint flickered in Mr. Montgomery's eye. "Yus, but wyte a minute," he said. "'Adn't yer just better give me them prints and negatives before yer go?"

Mr. Glencannon sighed gustily, and his face was shadowed with sorrow. "Why, sairtainly ye can hae them!" he said. "Ah, but it grieves me sorely, my guid friend, to see ye suspect that I micht sell them elsewhere. Here, tak' them, tak' them wi' my blessing!" And pondering the universal mistrust which pervades mankind, he disappeared up the ladder.

IV

At 7.45 that evening, Mr. Glencannon presented himself in the foyer of the Hotel Ruhl, told the clerk that Mr. Montgomery was calling upon Mr. Forsyth-Connor, and was at once requested to go up to the latter's rooms.

As he walked through the scarlet-carpeted corridors of the fourth floor, he patted his hip to make sure that his monkey-wrench was readily accessible, and thrust his left hand into his coat pocket to conceal the fact that it was adorned with a spiked knuckle-duster of rather clever design. "Aye," he muttered, as he rapped upon the door of room 431, "'tis a'ways weel to be on the safe side, e'en wi' that jockoss Montgomery's fairy godfathers!"

He heard limping footsteps within. The door was opened by the beaming Mr. Forsythe-Connor, who stood leaning on his stick. "Come in," he invited, "come in, Mister Mont—er, oh, who are you, sir?"

Mr. Glencannon slid into the room and closed the door behind him. "Ne'er mind who I am," he whispered hoarsely. "It's aboot those peectures. . . ."

With a fluid gesture, Mr. Forsythe-Connor's hand came up from the top of his stick and brought with it a twenty-inch stiletto, the needle point of which he pressed against Mr. Glencannon's ample Adam's apple.

"Put up your hands—higher, higher," he ordered, the paternal smile never leaving his face. "Now, who are you anyway? What pictures are you talking about?"

Mr. Glencannon gulped once or twice, but the blade scratched so uncomfortably that he decided to give it up.

"Muster Forsythe-Connor," he said boldly, "if ye dinna tak' that sword away fra' my tonsils this vurre minute, ye'll be i' the domdest fix o' yere nosty spying life!"

"My good man, my good man!" the other protested incredulously. "Pray what in the world are you driving at?"

"Just this," said Mr. Glencannon. "That black hoond o' a Montgomery has robbed me and betrayed you. He didn' mak' those snopshots—I did. He was oot i' the lifeboat at the time, as the ship's log will prove. But he told me this afternoon aboot the bid ye made for them, and I told him to accept it. Then he tuk to wondering if he cudna get more money fra' somebody else. . . ."

"Who?" snapped Mr. Forsythe-Connor, momentarily forgetting to smile.

"Just who, I dinna ken," said Mr. Glencannon. "As a motter o' fact, I didna osk him, because I cudna accede to such a swundle. But just before I discovered that he'd stolen my

peectures, he did mention something about meeting somebody at eight o'clock to-night."

"Where?" The voice was strident with alarm. "Where?"

"Weel," drawled Mr. Glencannon, tilting back his head and smiling blandly at the crystal chandelier, "I'm a mon o' few wurrds, so I'll mak' ye a proposection. Noo feerst, o' course, there'll be the amount ye agreed to pay Montgomery. . . ."

"Yes, two hundred pounds," barked Mr. Forsythe-Connor. "Be quick, man!"

"Aye, twa hoondred poonds, I thocht so!" chuckled Mr. Glencannon. "He only mentioned one hoondred to me, but pairhops he'll be more accurate next time.—Twa hoondred for the peectures, and three hoondred for taking you to Muster Montgomery. I'll gae alang wi' ye, but ye can pay me the five hoondred i' advonce."

"Yes, yes—here!" said Mr. Forsythe-Connor, unlocking a little steel drawer in his wardrobe trunk and feverishly counting the banknotes into Mr. Glencannon's hand. "Now where is he?"

Mr. Glencannon hauled out a massive silver watch and consulted it sagely. "Just noo," he said, "we'll find our vurra guid friend stonding under the theerd tree on the richt as we turn into the Rue d'Alger fra' the Boulevard Solferino."

"Rue d'Alger!" gasped Mr. Forsythe-Connor, snatching up his hat and hobbling toward the door. "Good lord, there're half a dozen consulates on that street! Come on, my car's downstairs!"

There were chauffeur and footman in the car, and even as it pulled away from the curb, Mr. Forsythe-Connor was snapping instructions to them through the speaking tube. When he had finished, they were purring along the Boulevard Solferino.

"You and I," he said to Mr. Glencannon, "will remain quietly in the car until this little affair is, ah, settled.—You, especially." There was a faint click as the safety-lever of an automatic pistol was released within a pocket.

They turned into the Rue d'Alger. In the shadow of the third tree on the right, Mr. Montgomery was pacing back and forth. As the car slowed down beside him, the footman leaned out from the running board and beckoned.

Mr. Montgomery stepped eagerly to the kerb, and directly into the swishing downward course of a flexible rubber blackjack.

"Ah, losh, what technique!" breathed Mr. Glencannon.

In an instant the car was under way again. The footman passed back a wallet and a crumpled envelope. Mr. Forsythe-Connor, switching on the light, hastily examined its contents. ". . . Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, yes, eighteen prints and eighteen negatives. Correct!" he announced with evident relief.

Again there came a click of the automatic's safety, but this time it was being moved the other way. "Everything, ah, seems to be quite in order," he smiled. "Shall I drop you at your ship? Right-o! By the way, sir, these are extraordinarily good photographs."

The car halted at the corner of the Rue Gauthier, and Mr. Glencannon descended.

"Well, *au revoir* and many thanks," said Mr. Forsythe-Connor. "If you ever happen to have any more pictures of, ah, technical subjects—ships, dry-docks, aircraft or what-not—I'd be awfully glad if you'd let me know."

"Aye, no doot ye wud!" chuckled Mr. Glencannon, as he watched the car disappear toward Ventimiglia and Italy—"Especially, the eighteen duplicate prints whuch are noo i' my room, but whuch will be somewhere i' the Rue d'Alger to-morrow!"

It was midnight when Mr. Montgomery returned to the ship, but Mr. Glencannon was waiting up for him.

"Weel," the Engineer greeted, "hae ye got the money? But whurra mon, what's happened to yer head?"

"Oh, I've 'ad a 'orrible time!" wailed Mr. Montgomery, sinking into a chair. "I was slugged, I was, and everything stole orff me. Lawks, but I've got a 'eadache!"

"But the money, mon—the snopshots! Ye dinna mean to say . . ."

"Yus," confessed Mr. Montgomery. "They—they swiped the pitchers, too. Yer see, this afternoon, a 'all boy from the Ruhl brought me a note from Mr. Forsythe-Connor telling me to meet 'im in the Rue d'Alger, instead of coming to the 'otel. So to-night, I . . ."

"Let me see the note!" thundered Mr. Glencannon, and his wrath was terrible to behold. "Great swith, ye gowk,

d'ye think ye can mulct me o' my richtful due wi' ony such cock-and-bull story as this? Ye've sold the peectures, that's what ye've done, and noo ye're holding oot on me!"

"I ayn't, I ayn't!" protested Mr. Montgomery, his lip trembling. "Strike me green and 'ope to die, it orl 'appened h'exackly like I've told yer. They stole the note. Why, they even stole my wallet with three quid h'eighteen shillings in it!"

Mr. Glencannon sat back and contemplated him sternly. Then, gradually he seemed to relent. "Weel," he said at length, "I'm a mon wi' a trusting nature, and I've no alternative but to tak' yere wurrd fer it onyway. I bear ye no ill-will, Muster Montgomery—i' fact, if ye're finoncially emborassed alang toward the end o' the month, I micht even conseeder loaning ye a few sheelings, just between shipmates. The rate o' interest, o' course, will be steepulated i' advonce."

THE VESSEL OF WRATH



SOMERSET MAUGHAM

WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM, born 1874, physician and surgeon, author and playwright, officer of the Legion of Honour, based his first book *Liza of Lambeth* on his medical experiences in the poverty-stricken slums of London. He has had three plays running in London at the same time, and all were a success, and he has achieved equal popularity with his novels and short stories.

THE VESSEL OF WRATH

THERE are few books in the world that contain more meat than the "Sailing Directions", published by the Hydrographic Department by order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. They are handsome volumes, bound (very flimsily) in cloth of different colours, and the most expensive of them is cheap. For four shillings you can buy the "Yangste Kiang Pilot", "containing a description of, and sailing directions for, the Yangste Kiang from the Wusung river to the highest navigable point, including the Han Kiang, the Kialing Kiang, and the Min Kiang"; and for three shillings you can get Part III of the "Eastern Archipelago Pilot", "comprising the N.E. end of Celebes, Molucca and Gilolo passages, Banda and Arafura Seas, and North, West, and South-West coasts of New Guinea." But it is not very safe to do so if you are a creature of settled habits that you have no wish to disturb or if you have an occupation that holds you fast to one place. These business-like books take you upon enchanted journeys of the spirit; and their matter-of-fact style, the admirable order, the concision with which the material is set before you, the stern sense of the practical that informs every line, cannot dim the poetry that, like the spice-laden breeze that assails your senses with a more than material languor when you approach some of those magic islands of the Eastern seas, blows with so sweet a fragrance through the printed pages. They tell you the anchorages and the landing places, what supplies you can get at each spot, and where you can get water; they tell you the lights and buoys, tides, winds and weather that you will find there. They give you brief information about the population and the trade. And it is strange, when you think how sedately it is all set down, with no words wasted, that so much else is given you besides. What? Well, mystery and beauty, romance and the glamour of the unknown. It is no common book that offers you, casually turning its

pages, such a paragraph as this: "Supplies. A few jungle fowl are preserved, the island is also the resort of vast numbers of sea birds. Turtle are found in the lagoon, as well as quantities of various fish, including grey mullet, shark, and dog-fish; the seine cannot be used with any effect; but there is a fish which may be taken on a rod. A small store of tinned provisions and spirits is kept in a hut for the relief of shipwrecked persons. Good water may be obtained from a well near the landing-place." Can the imagination want more material than this to go on a journey through time and space?

In the volume from which I have copied this passage, the compilers with the same restraint have described the Alas Islands. They are composed of a group or chain of islands, "for the most part low and wooded, extending about 75 miles east and west, and 40 miles north and south." The information about them, you are told, is very slight; there are channels between the different groups, and several vessels have passed through them, but the passages have not been thoroughly explored, and the positions of many of the dangers not yet determined; it is therefore advisable to avoid them. The population of the group is estimated at about 8000, of whom 200 are Chinese and 400 Mohammedans. The rest are heathen. The principal island is called Baru, it is surrounded by a reef, and here lives a Dutch Contrôleur. His white house with its red roof on the top of a little hill is the most prominent object that the vessels of the Royal Netherlands Steam Packet Company see when every other month on their way up to Macassar and every four weeks on their way down to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea they touch at the island.

At a certain moment of the world's history the Contrôleur was Mynheer Evert Gruyter and he ruled the people who inhabited the Alas Islands with firmness tempered by a keen sense of the ridiculous. He had thought it a very good joke to be placed at the age of twenty-seven in a position of such consequence and at thirty he was still amused by it. There was no cable communication between his islands and Batavia, and the mail arrived after so long a delay that even if he asked advice, by the time he received it, it was useless, and so he equably did what he thought best and trusted to his good fortune to keep out of trouble with the authorities. He was very short, not more than five feet four in height,

and extremely fat; he was of a florid complexion. For coolness' sake he kept his head shaved and his face was hairless. It was round and red. His eyebrows were so fair that you hardly saw them; and he had little twinkling blue eyes. He knew that he had no dignity, but for the sake of his position made up for it by dressing very dapperly. He never went to his office, nor sat in court, nor walked abroad but in spotless white. His stengah-shifter, with its bright brass buttons, fitted him very tightly and displayed the shocking fact that, young though he was, he had a round and protruding belly. His good-humoured face shone with sweat and he constantly fanned himself with a palm-leaf fan.

But in his house Mr. Gruyter preferred to wear nothing but a sarong and then with his white podgy little body he looked like a fat funny boy of sixteen. He was an early riser and his breakfast was always ready for him at six. It never varied. It consisted of a slice of papaia, three cold fried eggs, Edam cheese, sliced thin, and a cup of black coffee. When he had eaten it, he smoked a large Dutch cigar, read the papers if he had not read them through and through already, and then dressed to go down to his office.

One morning while he was thus occupied his head boy came into his bedroom and told him that Tuan Jones wanted to know if he could see him. Mr. Gruyter was standing in front of a looking-glass. He had his trousers on and was admiring his smooth chest. He arched his back in order to throw it out and throw in his belly and with a good deal of satisfaction gave his breast three or four resounding slaps. It was a manly chest. When the boy brought the message he looked at his own eyes in the mirror and exchanged a slightly ironic smile with them. He asked himself what the devil his visitor could want. Evert Gruyter spoke English, Dutch and Malay with equal facility, but he thought in Dutch. He liked to do this. It seemed to him a pleasantly ribald language.

"Ask the Tuan to wait and say I shall come directly." He put on his tunic, over his naked body, buttoned it up, and strutted into the sitting-room. The Rev. Owen Jones got up.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones," said the Contrôleur. "Have you come in to have a peg with me before I start my day's work?"

Mr. Jones did not smile.

"I've come to see you upon a very distressing matter, Mr. Gruyter," he answered.

The Contrôleur was not disconcerted by his visitor's gravity nor depressed by his words. His little blue eyes beamed amiably.

"Sit down, my dear fellow, and have a cigar."

Mr. Gruyter knew quite well that the Rev. Owen Jones neither drank nor smoked, but it tickled something prankish in his nature to offer him a drink and a smoke whenever they met. Mr. Jones shook his head.

Mr. Jones was in charge of the Baptist Mission on the Alas Islands. His headquarters were at Baru, the largest of them, with the greatest population, but he had meeting-houses under the care of native helpers in several other islands of the group. He was a tall, thin, melancholy man, with a long face, sallow and drawn, of about forty. His brown hair was already white on the temples and it receded from the forehead. This gave him a look of somewhat vacuous intellectuality. Mr. Gruyter both disliked and respected him. He disliked him because he was narrow-minded and dogmatic. Himself a cheerful pagan who liked the good things of the flesh and was determined to get as many of them as his circumstances permitted, he had no patience with a man who disapproved of them all. He thought the customs of the country suited its inhabitants and had no patience with the missionary's energetic efforts to destroy a way of life that for centuries had worked very well. He respected him because he was honest, zealous and good. Mr. Jones, an Australian of Welsh descent, was the only qualified doctor in the group and it was a comfort to know that if you fell ill you need not rely on a Chinese practitioner, and none knew better than the Contrôleur how useful to all Mr. Jones's skill had been and with what charity he had given it. On the occasion of an epidemic of influenza the missionary had done the work of ten men and no storm short of a typhoon could prevent him from crossing to one island or another if his help was needed.

He lived with his sister in a little white house about half a mile from the village and when the Contrôleur had arrived, came on board to meet him and begged him to stay till he could get his own house in order. The Contrôleur had

accepted and soon saw for himself with what simplicity the couple lived. It was more than he could stand. Tea at three sparse meals a day and when he lit his cigar Mr. Jones politely but firmly asked him to be good enough not to smoke, since both his sister and he strongly disapproved of it. In twenty-four hours Mr. Gruyter moved into his own house. He fled, with panic in his heart, as though from a plague-stricken city. The Contrôleur was fond of a joke and he liked to laugh; to be with a man who took your nonsense in deadly earnest and never even smiled at your best story was more than flesh and blood could stand. The Rev. Owen Jones was a worthy man, but as a companion he was impossible. His sister was worse. Neither had a sense of humour, but whereas the missionary was of a melancholy turn, doing his duty so conscientiously, with the obvious conviction that everything in the world was hopeless, Miss Jones was resolutely cheerful. She grimly looked on the bright side of things. With the ferocity of an avenging angel she sought out the good in her fellow-men. Miss Jones taught in the mission school and helped her brother in his medical work. When he did operations she gave the anæsthetic and was matron, dresser and nurse of the tiny hospital which on his own initiative Mr. Jones had added to the mission. But the Contrôleur was an obstinate little fellow and he never lost his capacity of extracting amusement from the Rev. Owen's dour struggle with the infirmities of human nature, and Miss Jones's ruthless optimism. He had to get his fun where he could. The Dutch boats came in three times in two months for a few hours and then he could have a good old crack with the captain and chief engineer, and once in a blue moon a pearling lugger came in from Thursday Island or Port Darwin and for two or three days he had a grand time. They were rough fellows, the pearlers, for the most part, but they were full of guts, and they had plenty of liquor on board, and good stories to tell, and the Contrôleur had them up to his house and gave them a fine dinner and the party was only counted a success if they were all too drunk to get back on the lugger again that night. But besides the missionary the only white man who lived on Baru was Ginger Ted, and he, of course, was a disgrace to civilization. There was not a single thing to be said in his favour. He cast discredit on the white race. All the same, but for

Ginger Ted, the Contrôleur sometimes thought he would find life on the island of Baru almost more than he could bear.

Oddly enough it was on account of this scamp that Mr. Jones, when he should have been instructing the pagan young in the mysteries of the Baptist faith, was paying Mr. Gruyter this early visit.

"Sit down, Mr. Jones," said the Contrôleur. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, I've come to see you about the man they call Ginger Ted. What are you going to do now?"

"Why, what's happened?"

"Haven't you heard? I thought the sergeant would have told you."

"I don't encourage the members of my staff to come to my private house unless the matter is urgent," said the Contrôleur rather grandly. "I am unlike you, Mr. Jones, I only work in order to have leisure and I like to enjoy my leisure without disturbance."

But Mr. Jones did not care much for small talk and he was not interested in general reflections.

"There was a disgraceful row in one of the Chinese shops last night. Ginger Ted wrecked the place and half killed a Chinaman."

"Drunk again, I suppose," said the Contrôleur placidly.

"Naturally. When is he anything else? They sent for the police and he assaulted the sergeant. They had to have six men to get him to the gaol."

"He's a hefty fellow," said the Contrôleur.

"I suppose you'll send him to Macassar."

Evert Gruyter returned the missionary's outraged look with a merry twinkle. He was no fool and he knew already what Mr. Jones was up to. It gave him considerable amusement to tease him a little.

"Fortunately my powers are wide enough to enable me to deal with the situation myself," he answered.

"You have power to deport anyone you like, Mr. Gruyter, and I'm sure it would save a lot of trouble if you got rid of the man altogether."

"I have the power, of course, but I am sure you would be the last person to wish me to use it arbitrarily."

"Mr. Gruyter, the man's presence here is a public scandal.

He's never sober from morning till night; it's notorious that he has relations with one native woman after another."

"That is an interesting point, Mr. Jones. I had always heard that alcoholic excess, though it stimulated sexual desire, prevented its gratification. What you tell me about Ginger Ted does not seem to bear out this theory."

The missionary flushed a dull red.

"These are physiological matters which at the moment I have no wish to go into," he said frigidly. "The behaviour of this man does incalculable damage to the prestige of the white race, and his example seriously hampers the efforts that are made in other quarters to induce the people of these islands to lead a less vicious life. He's an out-and-out bad lot."

"Pardon my asking, but have you made any attempts to reform him?"

"When he first drifted here I did my best to get in touch with him. He repelled all my advances. When there was that first trouble I went to him and talked to him straight from the shoulder. He swore at me."

"No one has a greater appreciation than I of the excellent work that you and other missionaries do on these islands, but are you sure that you always exercise your calling with all the tact possible?"

The Contrôleur was rather pleased with this phrase. It was extremely courteous and yet contained a reproof that he thought worth administering. The missionary looked at him gravely. His sad brown eyes were full of sincerity.

"Did Jesus exercise tact when he took a whip and drove the money-changers from the Temple? No, Mr. Gruyter. Tact is the subterfuge the lax avail themselves of to avoid doing their duty."

Mr. Jones's remark made the Contrôleur feel suddenly that he wanted a bottle of beer. The missionary leaned forward earnestly.

"Mr. Gruyter, you know this man's transgressions just as well as I do. It's unnecessary for me to remind you of them. There are no excuses for him. Now he really has overstepped the limit. You'll never have a better chance than this. I beg you to use the power you have and turn him out once for all."

The Contrôleur's eyes twinkled more brightly than ever. He was having a lot of fun. He reflected that human beings were much more amusing when you did not feel called upon in dealing with them to allot praise or blame.

"But, Mr. Jones, do I understand you right? Are you asking me to give you an assurance to deport this man before I've heard the evidence against him and listened to his defence?"

"I don't know what his defence can be."

The Contrôleur rose from his chair and really he managed to get quite a little dignity into his five feet four inches.

"I am here to administer justice according to the laws of the Dutch Government. Permit me to tell you that I am exceedingly surprised that you should attempt to influence me in my judicial functions."

The missionary was a trifle flustered. It had never occurred to him that this little whipper-snapper of a boy, ten years younger than himself, would dream of adopting such an attitude. He opened his mouth to explain and apologize, but the Contrôleur raised a podgy little hand.

"It is time for me to go to my office, Mr. Jones. I wish you good morning."

The missionary, taken aback, bowed and without another word walked out of the room. He would have been surprised to see what the Contrôleur did when his back was turned. A broad grin broke on his lips and he put his thumb to his nose and cocked a snook at the Rev. Owen Jones.

A few minutes later he went down to his office. His head clerk, who was a Dutch half-caste, gave him his version of the previous night's row. It agreed pretty well with Mr. Jones's. The Court was sitting that day.

"Will you take Ginger Ted first, sir?" asked the clerk.

"I see no reason to do that. There are two or three cases held over from the last sitting. I will take him in his proper order."

"I thought perhaps as he was a white man you would like to see him privately, sir."

"The majesty of the law knows no difference between white and coloured, my friend," said Mr. Gruyter, somewhat pompously.

The Court was a big square room with wooden benches

on which, crowded together, sat natives of all kinds, Polynesians, Bugis, Chinese, Malays, and they all rose when a door was opened and a sergeant announced the arrival of the Contrôleur. He entered with his clerk and took his place on a little dais at a table of varnished pitch pine. Behind him was a large engraving of Queen Wilhelmina. He despatched half a dozen cases and then Ginger Ted was brought in. He stood in the dock, handcuffed, with a warder on either side of him. The Contrôleur looked at him with a grave face, but he could not keep the amusement out of his eyes.

Ginger Ted was suffering from a hang-over. He swayed a little as he stood and his eyes were vacant. He was a man still young, thirty perhaps, of somewhat over the middle height, rather fat, with a bloated red face and a shock of curly red hair. He had not come out of the tussle unscathed. He had a black eye and his mouth was cut and swollen. He wore khaki shorts, very dirty and ragged, and his singlet had been almost torn off his back. A great rent showed the thick mat of red hair with which his chest was covered, but showed also the astonishing whiteness of his skin. The Contrôleur looked at the charge sheet. He called the evidence. When he had heard it, when he had seen the Chinaman whose head Ginger Ted had broken with a bottle, when he had heard the agitated story of the sergeant who had been knocked flat when he tried to arrest him, when he had listened to the tale of the havoc wrought by Ginger Ted who in his drunken fury had smashed everything he could lay hands on, he turned and addressed the accused in English.

"Well, Ginger, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I was blind. I don't remember a thing about it. If they say I half killed 'im I suppose I did. I'll pay the damage if they'll give me time."

"You will, Ginger," said the Contrôleur, "but it's me who'll give you time."

He looked at Ginger Ted for a minute in silence. He was an unappetising object. A man who had gone completely to pieces. He was horrible. It made you shudder to look at him and if Mr. Jones had not been so officious, at that moment the Contrôleur would certainly have ordered him to be deported.

"You've been a trouble ever since you came to the islands, Ginger. You're a disgrace. You're incorrigibly idle. You've

been picked up in the street dead drunk time and time again. You've kicked up row after row. You're hopeless. I told you the last time you were brought here that if you were arrested again I should deal with you severely. You've gone the limit this time and you're for it. I sentence you to six months' hard labour."

"Me?"

"You."

"By God, I'll kill you when I come out."

He burst into a string of oaths both filthy and blasphemous. Mr. Gruyter listened scornfully. You can swear much better in Dutch than in English and there was nothing that Ginger Ted said that he could not have effectively capped.

"Be quiet," he ordered. "You make me tired."

The Contrôleur repeated his sentence in Malay and the prisoner was led struggling away.

Mr. Gruyter sat down to tiffin in high good humour. It was astonishing how amusing life could be if you exercised a little ingenuity. There were people in Amsterdam, and even in Batavia and Surabaya, who looked upon his island home as a place of exile. They little knew how agreeable it was and what fun he could extract from unpromising material. They asked him whether he did not miss the club and the races and the cinema, the dances that were held once a week at the Casino and the society of Dutch ladies. Not at all. He liked comfort. The substantial furniture of the room in which he sat had a satisfying solidity. He liked reading French novels of a frivolous nature and he appreciated the sensation of reading one after the other without the uneasiness occasioned by the thought that he was wasting his time. It seemed to him a great luxury to waste time. When his young man's fancy turned to thoughts of love his head boy brought to the house a little dark-skinned bright-eyed creature in a sarong. He took care to form no connection of a permanent nature. He thought that change kept the heart young. He enjoyed freedom and was not weighed down by a sense of responsibility. He did not mind the heat. It made a sluice over with cold water half a dozen times a day a pleasure that had almost an æsthetic quality. He played the piano. He wrote letters to his friends in Holland. He felt no need for the conversation of

intellectual persons. He liked a good laugh, but he could get that out of a fool just as well as out of a professor of philosophy. He had a notion that he was a very wise little man.

Like all good Dutchmen in the Far East he began his lunch with a small glass of Hollands gin. It has a musty acrid flavour, and the taste for it must be acquired, but Mr. Gruyter preferred it to any cocktail. When he drank it he felt besides that he was upholding the traditions of his race. Then he had *rysttafel*. He had it every day. He heaped a soup-plate high with rice, and then, his three boys waiting on him, helped himself to the curry that one handed to him, to the fried egg that another brought, and to the condiment presented by the third. Then each one brought another dish of bacon, or bananas, or pickled fish, and presently his plate was piled high in a huge pyramid. He stirred it all together and began to eat. He ate slowly and with relish. He drank a bottle of beer.

He did not think while he was eating. His attention was applied to the mass in front of him and he consumed it with a happy concentration. It never palled on him. And when he had emptied the great plate it was a compensation to think that next day he would have *rysttafel* again. He grew tired of it as little as the rest of us grow tired of bread. He finished his beer and lit his cigar. The boy brought him a cup of coffee. He leaned back in his chair then and allowed himself the luxury of reflection.

It tickled him to have sentenced Ginger Ted to the richly deserved punishment of six months' hard labour, and he smiled when he thought of him working on the roads with the other prisoners. It would have been silly to deport from the island the one man with whom he could occasionally have a heart-to-heart talk, and besides, the satisfaction it would have given the missionary would have been bad for that gentleman's character. Ginger Ted was a scamp and a scallywag, but the Contrôleur had a kindly feeling for him. They had drunk many a bottle of beer in one another's company and when the pearl fishers from Port Darwin came in and they all made a night of it, they had got gloriously tight together. The Contrôleur liked the reckless way in which Ginger Ted squandered the priceless treasure of life.

Ginger Ted had wandered in one day on the ship that

was going up from Merauke to Macassar. The captain did not know how he had found his way there, but he had travelled steerage with the natives, and he stopped off at the Alas Islands because he liked the look of them. Mr. Gruyter had a suspicion that their attraction consisted perhaps in their being under the Dutch flag and so out of British jurisdiction. But his papers were in order, so there was no reason why he should not stay. He said that he was buying pearl-shell for an Australian firm, but it soon appeared that his commercial undertakings were not serious. Drink, indeed, took up so much of his time that he had little left over for other pursuits. He was in receipt of two pounds a week, paid monthly, which came regularly to him from England. The Contrôleur guessed that this sum was paid only so long as he kept well away from the persons who sent it. It was anyway too small to permit him any liberty of movement. Ginger Ted was reticent. The Contrôleur discovered that he was an Englishman, this he learnt from his passport, which described him as Edward Wilson, and that he had been in Australia. But why he had left England and what he had done in Australia he had no notion. Nor could he ever quite tell to what class Ginger Ted belonged. When you saw him in a filthy singlet and a pair of ragged trousers, a battered topi on his head, with the pearl-fishers and heard his conversation, coarse, obscene and illiterate, you thought he must be a sailor before the mast who had deserted his ship, or a labourer, but when you saw his handwriting you were surprised to find that it was that of a man not without at least some education, and on occasion when you got him alone, if he had had a few drinks but was not yet drunk, he would talk of matters that neither a sailor nor a labourer would have been likely to know anything about. The Contrôleur had a certain sensitiveness and he realized that Ginger Ted did not speak to him as an inferior to a superior but as an equal. Most of his remittance was mortgaged before he received it, and the Chinamen to whom he owed money were standing at his elbow when the monthly letter was delivered to him, but with what was left he proceeded to get drunk. It was then that he made trouble, for when drunk he grew violent and was then likely to commit acts that brought him into the hands of the police. Hitherto Mr. Gruyter had contented himself with keeping him in gaol till he was sober

and giving him a talking to. When he was out of money he cadged what drink he could from anyone who would give it him. Rum, brandy, arak, it was all the same to him. Two or three times Mr. Gruyter had got him work on plantations run by Chinese in one or other of the islands, but he could not stick to it, and in a few weeks was back again at Baru on the beach. It was a miracle how he kept body and soul together. He had, of course, a way with him. He picked up the various dialects spoken on the islands, and knew how to make the natives laugh. They despised him, but they respected his physical strength, and they liked his company. He was as a result never at a loss for a meal or a mat to sleep on. The strange thing was, and it was this that chiefly outraged the Rev. Owen Jones, that he could do anything he liked with a woman. The Contrôleur could not imagine what it was they saw in him. He was casual with them and rather brutal. He took what they gave him, but seemed incapable of gratitude. He used them for his pleasure and then flung them indifferently away. Once or twice this had got him into trouble, and Mr. Gruyter had had to sentence an angry father for sticking a knife in Ginger Ted's back one night, and a Chinese woman had sought to poison herself by swallowing opium because he had deserted her. Once Mr. Jones came to the Contrôleur in a great state because the beachcomber had seduced one of his converts. The Contrôleur agreed that it was very deplorable, but could only advise Mr. Jones to keep a sharp eye on these young persons. The Contrôleur liked it less when he discovered that a girl whom he fancied a good deal himself and had been seeing for several weeks had all the time been according her favours also to Ginger Ted. When he thought of this particular incident he smiled again at the thought of Ginger Ted doing six month's hard labour. It is seldom in this life that in the process of doing your bounden duty you can get back on a fellow who has played you a dirty trick.

A few days later Mr. Gruyter was taking a walk, partly for exercise and partly to see that some job he wanted done was being duly proceeded with, when he passed a gang of prisoners working under the charge of a warder. Among them he saw Ginger Ted. He wore the prison sarong, a dingy tunic called in Malay a baju, and his own battered topi. They were repairing the road, and Ginger Ted was wielding

a heavy pick. The way was narrow and the Contrôleur saw that he must pass within a foot of him. He remembered his threats. He knew that Ginger Ted was a man of violent passion and the language he had used in the dock made it plain that he had not seen what a good joke it was of the Contrôleur's to sentence him to six months' hard labour. If Ginger Ted suddenly attacked him with the pick, nothing on God's earth could save him. It was true that the warder would immediately shoot him down, but meanwhile the Contrôleur's head would be bashed in. It was with a funny little feeling in the pit of his stomach that Mr. Gruyter walked through the gang of prisoners. They were working in pairs a few feet from one another. He set his mind on neither hastening his pace nor slackening it. As he passed Ginger Ted, the man swung his pick into the ground and looked up at the Contrôleur and as he caught his eye, winked. The Contrôleur checked the smile that rose to his lips and with official dignity strode on. But that wink, so lusciously full of sardonic humour, filled him with satisfaction. If he had been the Caliph of Bagdad instead of a junior official in the Dutch Civil Service, he would forthwith have released Ginger Ted, sent slaves to bath and perfume him, and having clothed him in a golden robe entertained him to a sumptuous repast.

Ginger Ted was an exemplary prisoner and in a month or two the Contrôleur, having occasion to send a gang to do some work on one of the outlying islands, included him in it. There was no gaol there, so the ten fellows he sent, under the charge of a warder, were billeted on the natives and after their day's work lived like free men. The job was sufficient to take up the rest of Ginger Ted's sentence. The Contrôleur saw him before he left.

"Look here, Ginger," he said to him, "here's ten guilders for you so that you can buy yourself tobacco when you're gone."

"Couldn't you make it a bit more? There's eight pounds a month coming in regularly."

"I think that's enough. I'll keep the letters that come for you, and when you get back you'll have a tidy sum. You'll have enough to take you anywhere you want to go."

"I'm very comfortable here," said Ginger Ted.

"Well, the day you come back, clean yourself up and

come over to my house. We'll have a bottle of beer together."

"That'll be fine. I guess I'll be ready for a good crack then."

Now chance steps in. The island to which Ginger Ted had been sent was called Maputiti, and like all the rest of them it was rocky, heavily wooded and surrounded by a reef. There was a village among coco-nuts on the seashore opposite the opening of the reef and another village on a brackish lake in the middle of the island. Of this some of the inhabitants had been converted to Christianity. Communication with Baru was effected by a launch that touched at the various islands at irregular intervals. It carried passengers and produce. But the villages were seafaring folk, and if they had to communicate urgently with Baru, manned a prahu and sailed the fifty miles or so that separated them from it. It happened that when Ginger Ted's sentence had but another fortnight to run the Christian headman of the village on the lake was taken suddenly ill. The native remedies availed him nothing and he writhed in agony. Messengers were sent to Baru imploring the missionary's help; but as ill luck would have it Mr. Jones was suffering at the moment from an attack of malaria. He was in bed and unable to move. He talked the matter over with his sister.

"It sounds like acute appendicitis," he told her.

"You can't go, Owen," she said.

"I can't let the man die."

Mr. Jones had a temperature of a hundred and four. His head was aching like mad. He had been delirious all night. His eyes were shining strangely and his sister felt that he was holding on to his wits by a sheer effort of will.

"You couldn't operate in the state you're in."

"No, I couldn't. Then Hassan must go."

Hassan was the dispenser.

"You couldn't trust Hassan. He'd never dare to do an operation on his own responsibility. And they'd never let him. I'll go. Hassan can stay here and look after you."

"You can't remove an appendix!"

"Why not? I've seen you do it. I've done lots of minor operations."

Mr. Jones felt he didn't quite understand what she was saying.

"Is the launch in?"

"No, it's gone to one of the islands. But I can go in the prahu the men came in."

"You? I wasn't thinking of you. You can't go."

"I'm going, Owen."

"Going where?" he said.

She saw that his mind was wandering already. She put her hand soothingly on his dry forehead. She gave him a dose of medicine. He muttered something and she realized that he did not know where he was. Of course she was anxious about him, but she knew that his illness was not dangerous, and she could leave him safely to the mission boy who was helping her nurse him and to the native dispenser. She slipped out of the room. She put her toilet things, a night-dress, and a change of clothes into a bag. A little chest with surgical instruments, bandages and antiseptic dressings was kept always ready. She gave them to the two natives who had come over from Maputiti, and telling the dispenser what she was going to do gave him instructions to inform her brother when he was able to listen. Above all he was not to be anxious about her. She put on her topi and sallied forth. The mission was about half a mile from the village. She walked quickly. At the end of the jetty the prahu was waiting. Six men manned it. She took her place in the stern and they set off with a rapid stroke. Within the reef the sea was calm, but when they crossed the bar they came upon a long swell. But this was not the first journey of the sort Miss Jones had taken and she was confident in the seaworthiness of the boat she was in. It was noon and the sun beat down from a sultry sky. The only thing that harassed her was that they could not arrive before dark, and if she found it necessary to operate at once she could count only on the light of hurricane lamps.

Miss Jones was a woman of hard on forty. Nothing in her appearance would have prepared you for such determination as she had just shown. She had an odd drooping gracefulness, which suggested that she might be swayed by every breeze; it was almost an affectation; and it made the strength of character which you soon discovered in her seem positively monstrous. She was flat-chested, tall and

extremely thin. She had a long sallow face and she was much afflicted with prickly heat. Her lank brown hair was drawn back straight from her forehead. She had rather small eyes, grey in colour, and because they were somewhat too close they gave her face a shrewish look. Her nose was long and thin and a trifle red. She suffered a good deal from indigestion. But this infirmity availed nothing against her ruthless determination to look upon the bright side of things. Firmly persuaded that the world was evil and men unspeakably vicious, she extracted any little piece of decency she could find in them with the modest pride with which a conjurer extracts a rabbit from a hat. She was quick, resourceful and competent. When she arrived on the island she saw that there was not a moment to lose if she was to save the headman's life. Under the greatest difficulties, showing a native how to give the anæsthetic, she operated, and for the next three days nursed the patient with anxious assiduity. Everything went very well and she realized that her brother could not have made a better job of it. She waited long enough to take out the stitches and then prepared to go home. She could flatter herself that she had not wasted her time. She had given medical attention to such as needed it, she had strengthened the small Christian community in its faith, admonished such as were lax and cast the good seed in places where it might be hoped under divine providence to take root.

The launch, coming from one of the other islands, put in somewhat late in the afternoon, but it was full moon and they expected to reach Baru before midnight. They brought her things down to the wharf and the people who were seeing her off stood about repeating their thanks. Quite a little crowd collected. The launch was loaded with sacks of copra, but Miss Jones was used to its strong smell and it did not incommode her. She made herself as comfortable a place to sit in as she could, and waiting for the launch to start, chatted with her grateful flock. She was the only passenger. Suddenly a group of natives emerged from the trees that embowered the little village on the lagoon and she saw that among them was a white man. He wore a prison sarong and a baju. He had long red hair. She at once recognized Ginger Ted. A policeman was with him. They shook hands and Ginger Ted shook hands with the villagers.

who accompanied him. They bore bundles of fruit and a jar which Miss Jones guessed contained native spirit, and these they put in the launch. She discovered to her surprise that Ginger Ted was coming with her. His term was up and instructions had arrived that he was to be returned to Baru in the launch. He gave her a glance, but did not nod—indeed Miss Jones turned away her head—and stepped in. The mechanic started his engine and in a moment they were jug-jugging through the channel in the lagoon. Ginger Ted clambered on to a pile of sacks and lit a cigarette.

Miss Jones ignored him. Of course she knew him very well. Her heart sank when she thought that he was going to be once more in Baru, creating a scandal and drinking, a peril to the women and a thorn in the flesh of all decent people. She knew the steps her brother had taken to have him deported and she had no patience with the Contrôleur, who would not see a duty that stared him so plainly in the face. When they had crossed the bar and were in the open sea Ginger Ted took the stopper out of the jar of arak and putting his mouth to it took a long pull. Then he handed the jar to the two mechanics who formed the crew. One was a middle-aged man and the other a youth.

"I do not wish you to drink anything while we are on the journey," said Miss Jones sternly to the elder one.

He smiled at her and drank.

"A little arak can do no one any harm," he answered. He passed the jar to his companion, who drank also.

"If you drink again I shall complain to the Contrôleur," said Miss Jones.

The elder man said something she could not understand, but which she suspected was very rude, and passed the jar back to Ginger Ted. They went along for an hour or more. The sea was like glass and the sun set radiantly. It set behind one of the islands and for a few minutes changed it into a mystic city of the skies. Miss Jones turned round to watch it and her heart was filled with gratitude for the beauty of the world.

"And only man is vile," she quoted to herself.

They went due east. In the distance was a little island which she knew they passed close by. It was uninhabited. A rocky islet thickly grown with virgin forest. The boatman lit his lamps. The night fell and immediately the sky

was thick with stars. The moon had not yet risen. Suddenly there was a slight jar and the launch began to vibrate strangely. The engine rattled. The head mechanic, calling to his mate to take the helm, crept under the housing. They seemed to be going more slowly. The engine stopped. She asked the youth what was the matter, but he did not know. Ginger Ted got down from the top of the copra sacks and slipped under the housing. When he reappeared she would have liked to ask him what had happened, but her dignity prevented her. She sat still and occupied herself with her thoughts. There was a long swell and the launch rolled slightly. The mechanic emerged once more into view and started the engine. Though it rattled like mad they began to move. The launch vibrated from stem to stern. They went very slowly. Evidently something was amiss, but Miss Jones was exasperated rather than alarmed. The launch was supposed to do six knots, but now it was just crawling along; at that rate they would not get into Baru till long, long after midnight. The mechanic, still busy under the housing, shouted out something to the man at the helm. They spoke in Bugi, of which Miss Jones knew very little. But after a while she noticed that they had changed their course and seemed to be heading for the little uninhabited island a good deal to the lee of which they should have passed.

"Where are we going?" she asked the helmsman with sudden misgiving.

He pointed to the islet. She got up and went to the housing and called to the man to come out.

"You're not going there? Why? What's the matter?"

"I can't get to Baru," he said.

"But you must. I insist. I order you to go to Baru."

The man shrugged his shoulders. He turned his back on her and slipped once more under the housing. Then Ginger Ted addressed her.

"One of the blades of the propeller has broken off. He thinks he can get as far as that island. We shall have to stay the night there and he'll put on a new propeller in the morning when the tide's out."

"I can't spend the night on an uninhabited island with three men," she cried.

"A lot of women would jump at it."

"I insist on going to Baru. Whatever happens we must get there to-night."

"Don't get excited, old girl. We've got to beach the boat to put a new propeller on, and we shall be all right on the island."

"How dare you speak to me like that. I think you're very insolent."

"You'll be O.K. We've got plenty of grub and we'll have a snack when we land. You have a drop of arak and you'll feel like a house on fire."

"You're an impertinent man. If you don't go to Baru I'll have you all put in prison."

"We're not going to Baru. We can't. We're going to that island and if you don't like it you can get out and swim."

"Oh, you'll pay for this."

"Shut up, you old cow," said Ginger Ted.

Miss Jones gave a gasp of anger. But she controlled herself. Even out there, in the middle of the ocean, she had too much dignity to bandy words with that vile wretch. The launch, the engine rattling horribly, crawled on. It was pitch dark now, and she could no longer see the island they were making for. Miss Jones, deeply incensed, sat with lips tight shut and a frown on her brow; she was not used to being crossed. Then the moon rose and she could see the bulk of Ginger Ted sprawling on the top of the piled sacks of copra. The glimmer of his cigarette was strangely sinister. Now the island was vaguely outlined against the sky. They reached it and the boatman ran the launch on to the beach. Suddenly Miss Jones gave a gasp. The truth had dawned on her and her anger changed to fear. Her heart beat violently. She shook in every limb. She felt dreadfully faint. She saw it all. Was the broken propeller a put-up job or was it an accident? She could not be certain; anyhow, she knew that Ginger Ted would seize the opportunity. Ginger Ted would rape her. She knew his character. He was mad about women. That was what he had done, practically, to the girl at the mission, such a good little thing, she was an excellent sempstress; they would have prosecuted him for that and he would have been sentenced to years of imprisonment, only very unfortunately the innocent child had gone back to him several times and indeed

had only complained of his ill usage when he left her for somebody else. They had gone to the Contrôleur about it, but he had refused to take any steps, saying in that coarse way of his that even if what the girl said was true, it didn't look very much, as though it had been an altogether unpleasant experience. Ginger Ted was a scoundrel. And she was a white woman. What chance was there that he would spare her? None. She must keep her wits about her. She must have courage. She was determined to sell her virtue dearly, and if he killed her—well, she would rather die than yield. And if she died she would rest in the arms of Jesus. For a moment a great light blinded her eyes and she saw the mansions of her Heavenly Father. They were a grand and sumptuous mixture of a picture palace and a railway station. The mechanics and Ginger Ted jumped out of the launch and, waist-deep in water, gathered round the broken propeller. She took advantage of their preoccupation to get her case of surgical instruments out of the box. She took out the four scalpels it contained and secreted them in her clothing. If Ginger Ted touched her she would not hesitate to plunge a scalpel in his heart.

"Now then, miss, you'd better get out," said Ginger Ted. "You'll be better off on the beach than in the boat."

She thought so too. At least there she would have freedom of action. Without a word she clambered over the copra sacks. He offered her his hand.

"I don't want your help," she said coldly.

"You can go to hell," he answered.

It was a little difficult to get out of the boat without showing her legs, but by the exercise of considerable ingenuity she managed it.

"Damned lucky we've got something to eat. We'll make a fire and then you'd better have a snack and a nip of arak."

"I want nothing. I only want to be left alone."

"It won't hurt me if you go hungry."

She did not answer. She walked, with head erect, along the beach. She held the largest scalpel in her closed fist. The moon allowed her to see where she was going. She looked for a place to hide. The thick forest came down to the very edge of the beach; but, afraid of its darkness (after all, she was but a woman), she dared not plunge into

its depth. She did not know what animals lurked there or what dangerous snakes. Besides, her instinct told her that it was better to keep those three bad men in sight; then if they came towards her she would be prepared. Presently she found a little hollow. She looked round. They seemed to be occupied with their own affairs and they could not see her. She slipped in. There was a rock between them and her so that she was hidden from them and yet could watch them. She saw them go to and from the boat carrying things. She saw them build a fire. It lit them luridly and she saw them sit around and eat, and she saw the jar of arak passed from one to the other. They were all going to get drunk. What would happen to her then? It might be that she could cope with Ginger Ted, though his strength terrified her, but against three she would be powerless. A mad idea came to her to go to Ginger Ted and fall on her knees before him and beg him to spare her. He must have some spark of decent feeling in him and she had always been so convinced that there was good even in the worst of men. He must have had a mother. Perhaps he had a sister. Ah, but how could you appeal to a man blinded with lust and drunk with arak? She began to feel terribly weak. She was afraid she was going to cry. That would never do. She needed all her self-control. She bit her lip. She watched them, like a tiger watching his prey; no, not like that, like a lamb watching three hungry wolves. She saw them put more wood on the fire and Ginger Ted, in his sarong, silhouetted by the flames. Perhaps after he had had his will of her he would pass her on to the others. How could she go back to her brother when such a thing had happened to her? Of course he would be sympathetic, but would he ever feel the same to her again? It would break his heart. And perhaps he would think that she ought to have resisted more. For his sake perhaps it would be better if she said nothing about it. Naturally the men would say nothing. It would mean twenty years in prison for them. But then, supposing she had a baby. Miss Jones instinctively clenched her hands with horror and nearly cut herself with the scalpel. Of course it would only infuriate them if she resisted.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "What have I done to deserve this?"

She flung herself down on her knees and prayed to God

to save her. She prayed long and earnestly. She reminded God that she was a virgin and just mentioned, in case it had slipped the divine memory, how much St. Paul had valued that excellent state. And then she peeped round the rock again. The three men appeared to be smoking and the fire was dying down. Now was the time that Ginger Ted's lewd thoughts might be expected to turn to the woman who was at his mercy. She smothered a cry, for suddenly he got up and walked in her direction. She felt all her muscles grow taut, and though her heart was beating furiously she clenched the scalpel firmly in her hand. But it was for another purpose that Ginger Ted had got up. Miss Jones blushed and looked away. He strolled slowly back to the others and sitting down again raised the jar of arak to his lips. Miss Jones, crouching behind the rock, watched with straining eyes. The conversation round the fire grew less and presently she divined, rather than saw, that the two natives wrapped themselves in blankets and composed themselves to slumber. She understood. This was the moment Ginger Ted had been waiting for. When they were fast asleep he would get up cautiously and without a sound, in order not to wake the others, creep stealthily towards her. Was it that he was unwilling to share her with them or did he know that his deed was so dastardly that he did not wish them to know of it? After all, he was a white man and she was a white woman. He could not have sunk so low as to allow her to suffer the violence of natives. But his plan, which was so obvious to her, had given her an idea; when she saw him coming she would scream, she would scream so loudly that it would wake the two mechanics. She remembered now that the elder, though he had only one eye, had a kind face. But Ginger Ted did not move. She was feeling terribly tired. She began to fear that she would not have the strength now to resist him. She had gone through too much. She closed her eyes for a minute.

When she opened them it was broad daylight. She must have fallen asleep and, so shattered was she by emotion, have slept till long after dawn. It gave her quite a turn. She sought to rise, but something caught in her legs. She looked and found that she was covered with two empty copra sacks. Someone had come in the night and put them over her. Ginger Ted! She gave a little scream. The

horrible thought flashed through her mind that he had outraged her in her sleep. No. It was impossible. And yet he had had her at his mercy. Defenceless. And he had spared her. She blushed furiously. She raised herself to her feet, feeling a little stiff, and arranged her disordered dress. The scalpel had fallen from her hand and she picked it up. She took the two copra sacks and emerged from her hiding-place. She walked towards the boat. It was floating in the shallow water of the lagoon.

"Come on, Miss Jones," said Ginger Ted. "We've finished. I was just going to wake you up."

She could not look at him, but she felt herself as red as a turkey cock.

"Have a banana?" he said.

Without a word she took it. She was very hungry, and she ate it with relish.

"Step on this rock and you'll be able to get in without wetting your feet."

Miss Jones felt as though she could sink into the ground with shame, but she did as he told her. He took hold of her arm—good heavens! his hand was like an iron vice, never, never could she have struggled with him—and helped her into the launch. The mechanic started the engine and they slid out of the lagoon. In three hours they were at Baru.

That evening, having been officially released, Ginger Ted went to the Contrôleur's house. He wore no longer the prison uniform, but the ragged singlet and the khaki shorts in which he had been arrested. He had had his hair cut and it fitted his head now like a curly little cap. He was thinner. He had lost his bloated flabbiness and looked younger and better. Mr. Gruyter, a friendly grin on his round face, shook hands with him and asked him to sit down. The boy brought two bottles of beer.

• "I'm glad to see you hadn't forgotten my invitation, Ginger," said the Contrôleur.

"Not likely. I've been looking forward to this for six months."

"Here's luck, Ginger Ted."

"Same to you, Contrôleur."

They emptied their glasses and the Contrôleur clapped his hands. The boy brought two more bottles.

"Well, you don't bear me any malice for the sentence I gave you, I hope."

"No bloody fear. I was mad for a minute, but I got over it. I didn't have half a bad time, you know. Nice lot of girls on that island, Contrôleur. You ought to give 'em a look over one of these days."

"You're a bad lot, Ginger."

"Terrible."

"Good beer, isn't it?"

"Fine."

"Let's have some more."

Ginger Ted's remittance had been arriving every month and the Contrôleur now had fifty pounds for him. When the damage he had done to the Chinaman's shop was paid for there would still be over thirty.

"That's quite a lot of money, Ginger. You ought to do something useful with it."

"I mean to," answered Ginger. "Spend it."

The Contrôleur sighed.

"Well, that's what money's for, I guess."

The Contrôleur gave his guest the news. Not much had happened during the last six months. Time on the Alas Islands did not matter very much and the rest of the world did not matter at all.

"Any wars anywhere?" asked Ginger Ted.

"No. Not that I've noticed. Harry Jervis found a pretty big pearl. He says he's going to ask a thousand quid for it."

"I hope he gets it."

"And Charlie McCormack's married."

"He always was a bit soft."

Suddenly the boy appeared and said Mr. Jones wished to know if he might come in. Before the Contrôleur could give an answer Mr. Jones walked in.

"I won't detain you long," he said. "I've been trying to get hold of this good man all day and when I heard he was here I thought you wouldn't mind my coming."

"How is Miss Jones?" asked the Contrôleur politely. "None the worse for her night in the open, I trust."

"She's naturally a bit shaken. She had a temperature and I've insisted on her going to bed, but I don't think it's serious."

The two men had got up on the missionary's entrance, and now the missionary went up to Ginger Ted and held out his hand.

"I want to thank you. You did a great and noble thing. My sister is right, one should always look for the good in their fellow-men; I am afraid I misjudged you in the past: I beg your pardon."

He spoke very solemnly. Ginger Ted looked at him with amazement. He had not been able to prevent the missionary taking his hand. He still held it.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You had my sister at your mercy and you spared her. I thought you were all evil and I am ashamed. She was defenceless. She was in your power. You had pity on her. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Neither my sister nor I will ever forget. God bless and guard you always."

Mr. Jones's voice shook a little and he turned his head away. He released Ginger Ted's hand and strode quickly to the door. Ginger Ted watched him with a blank face.

"What the blazes does he mean?" he asked.

The Contrôleur laughed. He tried to control himself, but the more he did the more he laughed. He shook and you saw the folds of his fat belly ripple under the sarong. He leaned back in his long chair and rolled from side to side. He did not laugh only with his face, he laughed with his whole body, and even the muscles of his podgy legs shook with mirth. He held his aching ribs. Ginger Ted looked at him frowning, and because he did not understand what the joke was he grew angry. He seized one of the empty beer bottles by the neck.

"If you don't stop laughing, I'll break your bloody head open," he said.

The Contrôleur mopped his face. He swallowed a mouthful of beer. He sighed and groaned because his sides were hurting him.

"He's thanking you for having respected the virtue of Miss Jones," he spluttered at last.

"Me?" cried Ginger Ted.

The thought took quite a long time to travel through his head, but when at last he got it he flew into a violent

rage. There flowed from his mouth such a stream of blasphemous obscenities as would have startled a marine.

"That old cow," he finished. "What does he take me for?"

"You have the reputation of being rather hot stuff with the girls, Ginger," giggled the little Contrôleur.

"I wouldn't touch her with the fag-end of a barge-pole. It never entered my head. The nerve. I'll wring his blasted neck. Look here, give me my money, I'm going to get drunk."

"I don't blame you," said the Contrôleur.

"That old cow," repeated Ginger Ted. "That old cow."

He was shocked and outraged. The suggestion really shattered his sense of decency.

The Contrôleur had the money at hand and having got Ginger Ted to sign the necessary papers gave it to him.

"Go and get drunk, Ginger Ted," he said, "but I warn you, if you get into mischief it'll be twelve months' next time."

"I shan't get into mischief," said Ginger Ted sombrely. He was suffering from a sense of injury. "It's an insult," he shouted at the Contrôleur. "That's what it is, it's a bloody insult."

He lurched out of the house, and as he went he muttered to himself: "dirty swine, dirty swine." Ginger Ted remained drunk for a week. Mr. Jones went to see the Contrôleur again.

"I'm very sorry to hear that poor fellow has taken up his evil course again," he said. "My sister and I are dreadfully disappointed. I'm afraid it wasn't very wise to give him so much money at once."

"It was his own money. I had no right to keep it back."

"Not a legal right, perhaps, but surely a moral right."

He told the Contrôleur the story of that fearful night on the island. With her feminine instinct, Miss Jones had realized that the man, inflamed with lust, was determined to take advantage of her, and, resolved to defend herself to the last, had armed herself with a scalpel. He told the Contrôleur how she had prayed and wept and how she had hidden herself. Her agony was indescribable, and she knew that she could never have survived the shame. She rocked to and fro and every moment she thought he was coming. And

there was no help anywhere and at last she had fallen asleep ; she was tired out, poor thing, she had undergone more than any human being could stand, and then when she awoke she found that he had covered her with copra sacks. He had found her asleep, and surely it was her innocence, her very helplessness that had moved him, he hadn't the heart to touch her ; he covered her gently with two copra sacks and crept silently away.

"It shows you that deep down in him there is something sterling. My sister feels it's our duty to save him. We must do something for him."

"Well, in your place I wouldn't try till he's got through all his money," said the Contrôleur, "and then if he's not in gaol you can do what you like."

But Ginger Ted didn't want to be saved. About a fortnight after his release from prison he was sitting on a stool outside a Chinaman's shop looking vacantly down the street when he saw Miss Jones coming along. He stared at her for a minute and once more amazement seized him. He muttered to himself and there can be little doubt that his mutterings were disrespectful. But then he noticed that Miss Jones had seen him and he quickly turned his head away ; he was conscious, notwithstanding, that she was looking at him. She was walking briskly, but she sensibly diminished her pace as she approached him. He thought she was going to stop and speak to him. He got up quickly and went into the shop. He did not venture to come out for at least five minutes. Half an hour later Mr. Jones himself came along and he went straight up to Ginger Ted with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Edward ? My sister told me I should find you here."

Ginger Ted gave him a surly look and did not take the proffered hand. He made no answer.

"We'd be so very glad if you'd come to dinner with us next Sunday. My sister's a capital cook and she'll make you a real Australian dinner."

"Go to hell," said Ginger Ted.

"That's not very gracious," said the missionary, but with a little laugh to show that he was not affronted. "You go and see the Contrôleur from time to time, why shouldn't you come and see us ? It's pleasant to talk to white people

now and then. Won't you let bygones be bygones? I can assure you of a very cordial welcome."

"I haven't got clothes fit to go out in," said Ginger Ted sulkily.

"Oh, never mind about that. Come as you are."

"I won't."

"Why not? You must have a reason."

Ginger Ted was a blunt man. He had no hesitation in saying what we should all like to when we receive unwelcome invitations.

"I don't want to."

"I'm sorry. My sister will be very disappointed."

Mr. Jones, determined to show that he was not in the least offended, gave him a breezy nod and walked on. Forty-eight hours later there mysteriously arrived at the house in which Ginger Ted lodged a parcel containing a suit of ducks, a tennis shirt, a pair of socks and some shoes. He was unaccustomed to receiving presents and next time he saw the Contrôleur asked him if it was he who had sent the things.

"Not on your life," replied the Contrôleur. "I'm perfectly indifferent to the state of your wardrobe."

"Well, then, who the hell can have?"

"Search me."

It was necessary from time to time for Miss Jones to see Mr. Gruyter on business and shortly after this she came to see him one morning in his office. She was a capable woman and though she generally wanted him to do something he had no mind to, she did not waste his time. He was a little surprised then to discover that she had come on a very trivial errand. When he told her that he could not take cognizance of the matter in question, she did not as was her habit try to convince him, but accepted his refusal as definite. She got up to go and then as though it were an afterthought said:

"Oh, Mr. Gruyter, my brother is very anxious that we should have the man they call Ginger Ted to supper with us and I've written him a little note inviting him for the day after to-morrow. I think he's rather shy, and I wonder if you'd come with him."

"That's very kind of you."

"My brother feels that we ought to do something for the poor fellow."

"A woman's influence and all that sort of thing," said the Contrôleur demurely.

"Will you persuade him to come? I'm sure he will if you make a point of it, and when he knows the way he'll come again. It seems such a pity to let a young man like that go to pieces altogether."

The Contrôleur looked up at her. She was several inches taller than he. He thought her very unattractive. She reminded him strangely of wet linen hung on a clothes-line to dry. His eyes twinkled, but he kept a straight face.

"I'll do my best," he said.

"How old is he?" she asked.

"According to his passport he's thirty-one."

"And what is his real name?"

"Wilson."

"Edward Wilson," she said softly.

"It's astonishing that after the life he's led he should be so strong," murmured the Contrôleur. "He has the strength of an ox."

"Those red-headed men sometimes are very powerful," said Miss Jones, but spoke as though she were choking.

"Quite so," said the Contrôleur.

Then for no obvious reason Miss Jones blushed. She hurriedly said good-bye to the Contrôleur and left his office.

"*Godverdomme!*" said the Contrôleur.

He knew now who had sent Ginger Ted the new clothes.

He met him during the course of the day and asked him whether he had heard from Miss Jones. Ginger Ted took a crumpled ball of paper out of his pocket and gave it to him. It was the invitation. It ran as follows:

Dear Mr. Wilson,—

My brother and I would be so very glad if you would come and have supper with us next Thursday at 7.30. The Contrôleur has kindly promised to come. We have some new records from Australia which I am sure you will like. I am afraid I was not very nice to you last time we met, but I did not know you so well then, and I am big enough to admit it when I have committed an error. I hope you will forgive me and let me be your friend.

*Yours sincerely,
Martha Jones.*

The Contrôleur noticed that she addressed him as Mr. Wilson and referred to his own promise to go, so that when she told him she had already invited Ginger Ted she had a little anticipated the truth.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going, if that's what you mean. Damned nerve."

"You must answer the letter."

"Well, I won't."

"Now look here, Ginger, you put on those new clothes and you come as a favour to me. I've got to go, and damn it all, you can't leave me in the lurch. It won't hurt you just once."

Ginger Ted looked at the Contrôleur suspiciously, but his face was serious and his manner sincere: he could not guess that within him the Dutchman bubbled with laughter.

"What the devil do they want me for?"

"I don't know. The pleasure of your society, I suppose."

"Will there be any booze?"

"No, but come up to my house at seven, and we'll have a tiddly before we go."

"Oh, all right," said Ginger Ted sulkily.

The Contrôleur rubbed his little fat hands with joy. He was expecting a great deal of amusement from the party. But when Thursday came and seven o'clock Ginger Ted was dead drunk and Mr. Gruyter had to go alone. He told the missionary and his sister the plain truth. Mr. Jones shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's no good, Martha, the man's hopeless."

For a moment Miss Jones was silent and the Contrôleur saw two tears trickle down her long thin nose. She bit her lip.

"No one is hopeless. Everyone has some good in him. I shall pray for him every night. It would be wicked to doubt the power of God."

Perhaps Miss Jones was right in this, but the divine providence took a very funny way of effecting its ends. Ginger Ted began to drink more heavily than ever. He was so troublesome that even Mr. Gruyter lost patience with him. He made up his mind that he could not have the fellow on the islands any more and resolved to deport him on the next boat that touched at Baru. Then a man died under

mysterious circumstances after having been for a trip to one of the islands and the Contrôleur learnt that there had been several deaths on the same island. He sent the Chinese who was the official doctor of the group to look into the matter, and very soon received intelligence that the deaths were due to cholera. Two more took place at Baru and the certainty was forced upon him that there was an epidemic.

The Contrôleur cursed freely. He cursed in Dutch, he cursed in English, and he cursed in Malay. Then he drank a bottle of beer and smoked a cigar. After that, he took thought. He knew the Chinese doctor would be useless. He was a nervous little man from Java and the natives would refuse to obey his orders. The Contrôleur was efficient, and knew pretty well what must be done, but he could not do everything single-handed. He did not like Mr. Jones, but just then he was thankful that he was at hand, and he sent for him at once. In ten minutes Mr. Jones was in the office. He was accompanied by his sister.

"You know what I want to see you about, Mr. Jones," he said abruptly.

"Yes. I've been expecting a message from you. That is why my sister has come with me. We are ready to put all our resources at your disposal. I need not tell you that my sister is as competent as a man."

"I know. I shall be very glad of her assistance."

They set to without further delay to discuss the steps that must be taken. Hospital huts would have to be erected and quarantine stations. The inhabitants of the various villages on the islands must be forced to take proper precautions. In a good many cases the infected villages drew their water from the same well as the uninfected, and in each case this difficulty would have to be dealt with according to circumstances. It was necessary to send round people to give orders and make sure that they were carried out. Negligence must be ruthlessly punished. The worst of it was that the natives would not obey other natives, and orders given by native policemen, themselves unconvinced of their efficacy, would certainly be disregarded. It was advisable for Mr. Jones to stay at Baru, where the population was largest, and his medical attention most wanted; and what with the official duties that forced him to keep in touch with the headquarters, it was impossible for Mr. Gruyter to visit all the other islands himself. Miss

Jones must go; but the natives of some of the outlying islands were wild and treacherous; the Contrôleur had had a good deal of trouble with them. He did not like the idea of exposing her to danger.

"I'm not afraid," she said.

"I daresay. But if you have your throat cut I shall get into trouble, and besides, we're so short-handed I don't want to risk losing your help."

"Then let Mr. Wilson come with me. He knows the natives better than anyone, and can speak all their dialects."

"Ginger Ted?" The Contrôleur stared at her. "He's just getting over an attack of D.T.s."

"I know," she answered.

"You know a great deal, Miss Jones."

Even though the moment was so serious, Mr. Gruyter could not but smile. He gave her a sharp look, but she met it coolly.

"There's nothing like responsibility for bringing out what there is in a man, and I think something like this may be the making of him."

"Do you think it would be wise to trust yourself for days at a time to a man of such infamous character?" said the missionary.

"I put my trust in God," she answered gravely.

"Do you think he'd be any use?" asked the Contrôleur. "You know what he is."

"I'm convinced of it." Then she blushed. "After all, no one knows better than I that he's capable of self-control."

The Contrôleur bit his lip.

"Let's send for him."

He gave a message to the sergeant, and in a few minutes Ginger Ted stood before them. He looked ill. He had evidently been much shaken by his recent attack, and his nerves were all to pieces. He was in rags, and he had not shaved for a week. No one could have looked more disreputable.

"Look here, Ginger," said the Contrôleur, "it's about this cholera business. We've got to force the natives to take precautions, and we want you to help us."

"Why the hell should I?"

"No reason at all. Except philanthropy."

"Nothing doing, Contrôleur. I'm not a philanthropist."

"That settles that. That was all. You can go."

But as Ginger Ted turned to the door Miss Jones stopped him.

"It was my suggestion, Mr. Wilson. You see, they want me to go to Labobo and Sakunchi, and the natives there are so funny I was afraid to go alone. I thought if you came I should be safer."

He gave her a look of extreme distaste.

"What do you suppose I care if they cut your throat?"

Miss Jones looked at him, and her eyes filled with tears. She began to cry. He stood and watched her stupidly.

"There's no reason why you should." She pulled herself together and dried her eyes. "I'm being silly. I shall be all right. I'll go alone."

"It's damned foolishness for a woman to go to Labobo."

She gave him a little smile.

"I daresay it is, but you see, it's my job, and I can't help myself. I'm sorry if I offended you by asking you. You must forget about it. I daresay it wasn't quite fair to ask you to take such a risk."

For quite a minute Ginger Ted stood and looked at her. He shifted from one foot to the other. His surly face seemed to grow black.

"Oh, hell, have it your own way," he said at last. "I'll come with you. When d'you want to start?"

They set out next day, with drugs and disinfectants, in the Government launch. Mr. Gruyter, as soon as he had put the necessary work in order, was to start off in a prahu in the other direction. For four months the epidemic raged. Though everything possible was done to localise it, one island after another was attacked. The Contrôleur was busy from morning to night. He had no sooner got back to Baru from one or other of the islands to do what was necessary there than he had to set off again. He distributed food and medicine. He cheered the terrified people. He supervised everything. He worked like a dog. He saw nothing of Ginger Ted, but he heard from Mr. Jones that the experiment was working out beyond all hopes. The scamp was behaving himself. He had a way with the natives; and by cajolery, firmness, and on occasion, the use of his fist, managed to make them take the steps necessary for their own safety. Miss Jones could congratulate herself on the success of the scheme. But the

Contrôleur was too tired to be amused. When the epidemic had run its course he rejoiced because out of a population of eight thousand only six hundred had died.

Finally he was able to give the district a clean bill of health.

One evening he was sitting in his sarong on the veranda of his house and he read a French novel with the happy consciousness that once more he could take things easy. His head boy came in and told him that Ginger Ted wished to see him. He got up from his chair and shouted to him to come in. Company was just what he wanted. It had crossed the Contrôleur's mind that it would be pleasant to get drunk that night, but it is dull to get drunk alone, and he had regretfully put the thought aside. And heaven had sent Ginger Ted in the nick of time. By God, they would make a night of it. After four months they deserved a bit of fun. Ginger Ted entered. He was wearing a clean suit of white ducks. He was shaved. He looked another man.

"Why, Ginger, you look as if you'd been spending a month at a health resort instead of nursing a pack of natives dying of cholera. And look at your clothes. Have you just stepped out of a band-box?"

Ginger Ted smiled rather sheepishly. The head boy brought two bottles of beer and poured them out.

"Help yourself, Ginger," said the Contrôleur, as he took his glass.

"I don't think I'll have any, thank you."

The Contrôleur put down his glass and looked at Ginger Ted with amazement.

"Why, what's the matter? Aren't you thirsty?"

"I don't mind having a cup of tea."

"A cup of what?"

"I'm on the wagon. Martha and I are going to be married."

"Ginger!"

The Contrôleur's eyes popped out of his head. He scratched his shaven pate.

"You can't marry Miss Jones," he said. "No one could marry Miss Jones."

"Well, I'm going to. That's what I've come to see you about. Owen's going to marry us in chapel, but we want to be married by Dutch law as well."

"A joke's a joke, Ginger. What's the idea?"

"She wanted it. She fell for me that night we spent on the island when the propeller broke. She's not a bad old girl when you get to know her. It's her last chance, if you understand what I mean, and I'd like to do something to oblige her. And she wants someone to take care of her, there's no doubt about that."

"Ginger, Ginger, before you can say knife she'll make you into a damned missionary."

"I don't know that I'd mind that so much if we had a little mission of our own. She says I'm a bloody marvel with the natives. She says I can do more with a native in five minutes than Owen can do in a year. She says she's never known anyone with the magnetism I have. It seems a pity to waste a gift like that."

The Contrôleur looked at him without speaking and slowly nodded his head three or four times. She'd nobbled him, all right.

"I've converted seventeen already," said Ginger Ted.

"You? I didn't know you believed in Christianity."

"Well, I don't know that I did exactly, but when I talked to 'em and they just came into the fold like a lot of blasted sheep, well, it gave me quite a turn. Blimey, I said, I daresay there's something in it, after all."

"You should have raped her, Ginger. I wouldn't have been hard on you. I wouldn't have given you more than three years and three years is soon over."

"Look here, Contrôleur, don't you ever let on that the thought never entered my head. Women are touchy, you know, and she'd be as sore as hell if she knew that."

"I guessed she'd got her eye on you, but I never thought it would come to this." The Contrôleur in an agitated manner walked up and down the veranda. "Listen to me, old boy," he said, after an interval of reflection, "we've had some grand times together, and a friend's a friend. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll lend you the launch and you can go and hide on one of the islands till the next ship comes along, and then I'll get 'em to slow down and take you on board. You've only got one chance now, and that's to cut and run."

Ginger Ted shook his head.

"It's no good, Contrôleur, I know you mean well, but I'm going to marry the blasted woman, and that's that. You don't know the joy of bringing all them bleeding sinners to

repentance, and Moses! that girl can make a treacle pudding. I haven't eaten a better one since I was a kid."

The Contrôleur was very much disturbed. The drunken scamp was his only companion on the islands, and he did not want to lose him. He discovered that he had even a certain affection for him. Next day he went to see the missionary.

"What's this I hear about your sister marrying Ginger Ted?" he asked him. "It's the most extraordinary thing I've ever heard in my life."

"It's true, nevertheless."

"You must do something about it. It's madness."

"My sister is of full age, and entitled to do as she pleases."

"But you don't mean to tell me you approve of it. You know Ginger Ted. He's a bum, and there are no two ways about it. Have you told her the risk she's running? I mean, bringing sinners to repentance and all that sort of thing's all right, but there are limits. And does the leopard ever change his spots?"

Then for the first time in his life the Contrôleur saw a twinkle in the missionary's eye.

"My sister is a very determined woman, Mr. Gruyter," he replied. "From that night they spent on the island, he never had a chance."

The Contrôleur gasped. He was as surprised as the prophet when the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? Perhaps Mr. Jones was human, after all.

"*Alle Jesus!*" muttered the Controleur.

Before anything more could be said, Miss Jones swept into the room. She was radiant. She looked ten years younger. Her cheeks were flushed, and her nose was hardly red at all.

"Have you come to congratulate me, Mr. Gruyter?" she cried, and her manner was sprightly and girlish. "You see, I was right, after all. Everyone has some good in them. You don't know how splendid Edward has been all through this terrible time. He's a hero. He's a saint. Even I was surprised."

"I hope you'll be very happy, Miss Jones."

"I know I shall. Oh, it would be wicked of me to doubt it. For it is the Lord who has brought us together."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. Don't you see? Except for the cholera Edward would never have found himself. Except for the cholera we should never have learnt to know one another. I have never seen the hand of God more plainly manifest."

The Contrôleur could not but think that it was rather a clumsy device to bring those two together that necessitated the death of six hundred innocent persons, but not being well versed in the ways of omnipotence, he made no remark.

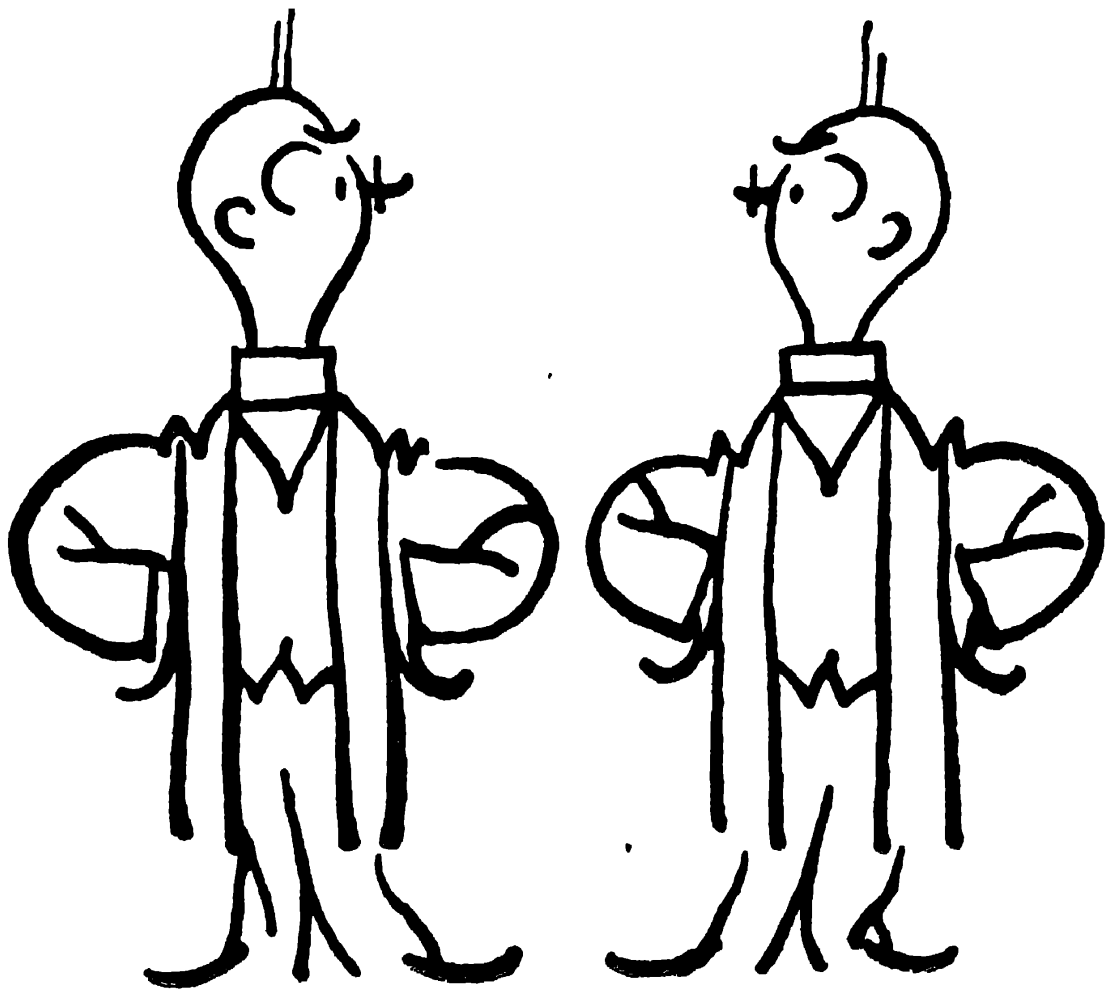
"You'll never guess where we're going for our honeymoon," said Miss Jones, perhaps a trifle archly.

"Java?"

"No, if you'll lend us the launch, we're going to that island where we were marooned. It has very tender recollections for both of us. It was there that I first guessed how fine and good Edward was. It's there I want him to have his reward."

The Contrôleur caught his breath. He left quickly, for he thought that unless he had a bottle of beer at once he would have a fit. He was never so shocked in his life.

LOCUM TENENS



IAN HAY

IAN HAY is the pen-name by which Major J. H. Beith, C.B.E., M.C., is known to a very large reading and theatre-going public. Since the success of his first novel, more than twenty-five years ago, he has written many books and plays, of which *The Middle Watch* and *The Midshipmaid* are among the most popular,

LOCUM TENENS

I

THE summer rain lashed down ; another gust of wind came sweeping round the corner ; and the motor-bicycle skidded giddily across the glistening road.

"A near shave that time, old soul !" observed Mr. Archibald Wade over his shoulder.

The gentleman addressed, Captain James Pryor, who for the last two hours had been enduring the acme of human discomfort upon the luggage-carrier, with his arms twined affectionately round his friend's waist, made no reply. Instead, he vacated his seat without warning or premeditation and assumed a recumbent attitude under an adjacent hedge. The motor-bicycle, unexpectedly lightened of half of its burden, miraculously righted itself, and, starting forward with a flick of its tail, whizzed on its way.

In due course it returned, trundled by its owner, who addressed the prostrate James reprovingly :—

"Tell me, my dear James, why did you dismount from the flapper-bracket ?"

"Dismount, you lunatic ?" replied the injured Pryor. "I fell off ! I was shot off, if you like."

"Why, I wonder ?" said Archibald thoughtfully.

"Because you came swinging round that last corner at forty miles an hour. We side-slipped, and I simply flew."

"It was foolish of you to fly without proper equipment, James. You are too ambitious—too impulsive. Are you in the Royal Air Force ? No ! You are only a machine-gunner. Machine-gunners don't fly : they pop—and stop. You have just stopped. Examine yourself, and decide——"

"For heaven's sake, Archie," exclaimed the exasperated James, "stop talking like a village idiot for a minute !" James was a serious-minded and slightly pessimistic young

man at the best of times ; he was also severely bruised and badly in love—a combination inimical to equability of temper.

"I fear you are unstrung, comrade," replied Archibald, quite unruffled.

"Unstrung or not," retorted James warmly, "I'll see you to blazes before I trust myself on your rotten machine for another yard !"

"This is no time," Archibald pointed out reprovingly, "for the venting of passion. Besides, I have troubles of my own : this blinking back tyre has burst. Do you happen to remember what the last milestone said ?"

"Popleigh, one mile," growled Captain Pryor.

"That is splendid."

"Why should it be splendid ? We want to get on to Tuckleford."

"Why should we go to Tuckleford ? What is Tuckleford to us ?"

"Well—" James hesitated, and reddened.

"Well, what ?"

"Well, if you must know, I am expecting to meet someone there."

"A girl, of course ?"

"Yes."

"Not—Dorothy ? *The* Dorothy ?"

James, with the rain streaming down his face, nodded dismally.

"Yes," he said. "That was why I suggested the trip."

Archibald considered.

"It is well," he said at length. "We can push this condemned sewing-machine on to Popleigh ; there we will obtain food and clothing, and I will get a new tyre. In the afternoon, if it clears up, I will convey you to Dorothy."

"How can we get food and clothing at Popleigh ?" demanded the irritable James. "Have you ever been to the place in your life ?"

"Never."

"Then why on earth——"

"Because I have had a rush of brains to the head. Do you remember *The Old Flick* ?"

James considered.

"Do you mean *Flick Windrum*, of *Trinity Hall* ?"

"The same."

"Yes. What about it? He became a Dodger, didn't he? Curate in Kensington, or something."

"He was, but not now. I have just remembered that he wrote to me a year ago saying that he had received a push up—promotion. A cure of souls—that's what he called it—a cure of souls in Popleigh. He must have cured quite a lot by this time. We will drop in at his parsonage, and touch him for a couple of them, and perhaps a bottle of Bass, and get our clothes dried. Then, hey for Dorothy!"

"Archibald," observed James, not without admiration, "you are quite balmy."

"I know," replied that irrepressible youth composedly. "The insanity of genius, really. You push the bike."

II

Half an hour later the motor-bicycle, still propelled by James, drew up at the gate of Popleigh Vicarage. The Vicarage itself stood well back from the road in a spacious garden—a riot of roses and honeysuckle—under the lee of an ancient Norman church. Simultaneously the summer storm passed, the clouds broke, and the hot July sun broke out hospitably.

Archibald Wade wheeled the bicycle up to the front door and rang the bell. After repeating the performance three times he turned to his depressed companion.

"I wonder where the old sinner can be," he remarked.

"We don't know," replied James through chattering teeth, "and we aren't likely to find out. Let's go and find the village pub."

"Peradventure," suggested Archibald, upon whose receptive soul the ecclesiastical atmosphere was already taking effect, "he is upon a journey, or sleepeth, what?"

He tried the handle of the door.

"Locked," he announced.

"Let's go round to the back," suggested the practical James.

The procession, now steaming comfortably, moved off again. The back door was also locked. Upon the panel was pinned a fluttering scrap of paper which said, *tout court* :

Bak at 3

"I wonder who wrote that," said James.

"From the spelling," replied Archibald, "I should say it was The Flick himself; but as it is written on buttery paper I expect it was the cook. Depend upon it, The Flick has taken the little creature out for a brisk country walk. Still, I know he would never forgive us if we gave him the go-by. Let us find a window."

The windows upon the ground floor were all closed, but one stood open above a veranda on the sunny side of the house. With the assistance of the faithful James, Mr. Wade clambered up the trellis work and effected his burglarious purpose. A minute later he opened the front door with a flourish, and admitted his shrinking accomplice. There ensued a tour of inspection.

"Dining-room!" announced Archibald, opening a door. "Table not laid for lunch. We will remedy that. Study—very snug! We will smoke there after. Kitchen! Aha, this is where we commandeer supplies. Now, my dear young friend, you will go upstairs and have a nice warm bath, while I raid the old man's dressing-room. Run along, or you will catch something."

The docile James departed upstairs. Twenty minutes later, emerging greatly refreshed from the bathroom, draped in a towel, he was confronted by a saintly figure in impeccable clerical attire.

"*Pax vobiscum*!" clanged Archibald, in a throaty baritone. "What do you think of my kit? It took a bit of getting on, I can tell you. James, I have discovered why parsons have to marry right away."

"Why?"

"Because they button up the back." The newly-ordained clerk revolved slowly upon his toes. "A pretty good fit, on the whole. I expected to find it rather small for me, but Flick appears to have swelled. James, I am warming up to this part. I am going to be a success in it. Let us go downstairs and find the harmonium."

"Dry up," urged James, "and tell me where I can get some clothes. I suppose I shall have to make a holy show of myself too?"

"Unfortunately not," replied his friend. "This is the only parsonical outfit that I can find. Probably it is what The Flick wears on Sunday."

"Do you mean that there are no more clothes in the house?"

"There is nothing in the dressing-room. But root about a bit, and you may find something. In the last extremity you can lunch in that bath-towel. Meanwhile, I will lay the table."

Archibald bounded exuberantly downstairs, his coat-tails flying. The disconsolate James tried yet another door. This time he found himself in what was plainly the spare room. The blinds were drawn; the bed was draped in a dust-sheet; the jug stood upon its head in the basin. Under a heap of clerical vestments in the wardrobe he discovered an old blue flannel suit—evidently a relic of The Flick's secular existence. With this he returned to the dressing-room, and having helped himself to a cricket shirt and a pair of socks, proceeded to invest himself in his borrowed plumes. They were a tight fit, for James was a large man.

"I wonder what that maniac is doing downstairs," he mused. "I hope he has made up the kitchen fire, so that we can dry our things. I can't face Dolly in this rig. Hallo! What's that?"

From the garden outside came the toot of a motor-horn; then a buzzing and popping right under the window; then silence.

Downstairs Archibald, depositing a fine ham upon the dining-room table, tip-toed to the window and peeped through the curtain. Outside the front door stood another motor-cycle, this time with side-car attached. Within the porch he could descry two persons. One—a female—was disencumbering her head of a voluminous motor-veil. Her male companion was ringing the bell.

After a fortifying glance at his own *ensemble* in the mirror over the mantelpiece, Archibald strode into the hall and opened the front door.

"Good morning," he said.

The male caller returned the greeting with a patronising nod. He was a slender young man, with large eyes and a low turned-down collar. But Archibald's first impression of him was that his hair required cutting.

"I trust you will pardon me," he said, "for coming to the door myself, but my servant"—a new inspiration came upon him as he spoke—"my manservant—is busy upstairs changing his clothes."

"Are you the incumbent of this parish?" inquired the young man, in the same patronising tone.

"I am his *locum tenens*," replied Archibald blandly. "Will you not enter?"

All this while the girl in the motor-veil had stood silent, with her large blue eyes fixed apprehensively upon Archibald Wade. Archibald mentally diagnosed her as a romantic and impulsive infant, without sufficient knowledge or discrimination to be aware that one must never be seen in public with a young man with bobbed hair.

He ushered his visitors into the study. Even as they crossed the hall he was conscious of the anxious and inquiring countenance of Captain James Pryor suspended in mid-air, like a harvest moon, over the banisters of the upper landing.

"And now," he inquired, taking up his new role with characteristic enjoyment, as the couple seated themselves upon the sofa, "what can I do for you, this lovely summer day?" He leaned back in The Flick's swing chair and smiled paternally. The young gentleman with the long hair gave a brief staccato cough.

"Are you licensed?" he inquired. Archibald sprang to his feet.

"My dear sir," he said, "a thousand apologies! I ought to have remembered! On such a warm morning, too! What will you take?"

This hospitable invitation was received with such unfeigned surprise that he realized that he had made a slip, and sat down again with a feeble giggle.

"You mean——?" he said.

"Is your church licensed," asked the young man, "for the performance of the marriage ceremony?"

"Oh yes," replied Archibald with a smile—"fully licensed. We are open on Sundays, too!" he added playfully.

"In that case," said the young man, with a glance at the girl by his side, "we desire that you should marry us." The girl gave a little hysterical gasp.

"Quite so," replied Archibald calmly. "To each other, I presume?"

The young man, after a brief stare, nodded his head.

"And when would you like the ceremony to take place?" continued Archibald, instinctively playing for time.

"At once," said the young man.

Archibald turned inquiringly to the young girl.

"Is that your wish?" he asked, smiling.

The girl turned crimson, and hesitated.

"Answer, Dorothy!" commanded the young man.

"Yes, please," whispered Dorothy.

III

Upstairs, five minutes later, pandemonium.

"I tell you it's little Dolly Venner!" reiterated the distracted James, upon whose toilet Archibald had broken in with the news of the emergency. "My little girl! And she's doing a bolt with that bounder!"

"Do you happen to know his name?" inquired Archibald.

"Lionel Gillibrand, or something like that. I don't know much about him, but he has been hanging round her ever since she and I had a row last November."

"Oh, you had a row, had you? What was it about?"

"I have no notion: you know what girls are. We were half-engaged—but only half; and I suppose I took things too much for granted.

"What do you mean, half-engaged?" demanded Archibald. "Be more succinct. Have you ever kissed her, for instance?"

"That's my business!" replied James briefly.

"That means you have. Proceed, *mon enfant*! You took things too much for granted. Yes?"

"We had a bit of a turn-up," continued James dolefully, "and she bunged me out for good and all. I haven't seen her since; but being down here with you and knowing she would probably be at the garden-party, I thought I would go over to Tuckleford to-day and try to get her to make it up. And now she's eloping with a feller like an Angora goat!" The unhappy young man groaned again.

"As things have turned out," remarked Archibald complacently, "nothing could have been more fortunate."

"Fortunate? What do you mean?"

"I mean that Providence has placed the matter in my hands. You are fortunate in having me to extricate your little friend from her predicament."

"Predicament? She's doing it of her own free will."

Archibald shook his head judicially.

"She may have started out of her own free will," he

remarked, "but she's scared stiff now. I think we can stop this marriage all right."

"What are you going to do about it? Refuse to marry them?" inquired James, with gloomy sarcasm.

"No, I don't think I shall refuse. If I do, they will only go to some one else, which would be a pity, because some one else might marry them, which I can't do under any circumstances. *Ergo*, she is safer in my hands."

"But what are you going to *do*?"

"I haven't the faintest notion yet, but I have no doubt that something will occur to me at the proper time. I believe that Napoleon also relied a good deal upon the inspiration of the moment. For the present I shall temporize, and exercise extreme tact. It won't do to put that little person's back up. I should say she was the sort who would cut off her nose to spite her face."

"She is!" agreed James, with feeling.

"Meanwhile," continued Archibald, "I have invited them to have luncheon. I am afraid I can't ask you to join us, under the circumstances, but you shall come in and wait at table."

"Wait?"

"Yes. It will add a spice of pleasurable excitement to the proceedings."

"But she would recognize me."

"It is most unlikely that she will so much as look at you. She is far too agitated to notice anything. Still, she might; and that is where the pleasurable excitement will come in. I think I shall disguise you a little. There is a pair of blue spectacles lying on the study table: Flick must have taken to glasses. You can wear those. Blacken that beautiful golden moustache of yours with burnt cork, and speak, when necessary, in a husky whisper. I will explain that you have got diphtheria, or something. Don't loiter about the room too much, of course. Just hand the dishes, and clear away, and so on."

"I refuse altogether—" began James emphatically.

"It's too late to refuse now," replied Archibald. "I have already mentioned to them that I keep a manservant. They saw you hanging over the banisters as we crossed the hall, and I had to explain your face somehow. Luckily it was rather dark. Well, that's settled. Don't overdo your part,

of course. Don't lean over the back of Dorothy's chair, or blow on the top of her head, or tickle the back of her neck, or anything loverlike of that kind."

"How long," inquired James resignedly—he had ever been clay in the hands of his volatile friend—"is this tomfool entertainment to go on?"

"Until I have an inspiration, or until The Flick turns up. It's lunch-time now: go and sound the gong."

Five minutes later the trio sat down to luncheon.

"Lenten fare, I fear, Mr. Gillibrand," remarked Archibald. "But a warm welcome goes with it."

"It is not Lent," said Mr. Gillibrand at once.

"Some of us," replied Archibald gently, "keep Lent all the year round, Mr. Gillibrand. Hand the cold salmon, Ja—John. Had you a pleasant ride, Mr. Gillibrand, until overtaken by the rain?"

"We had a fairly swift one, thanks," replied Gillibrand languidly. "I wish I'd had my car, though, instead of a hired motor-cycle. Still, we were doing thirty-five miles an hour through that last ten-mile limit, I should think." With some difficulty he helped himself to salmon, James's ideas as to the right distance from which to proffer food being elementary.

"Leo is a dreadfully reckless driver," said Dorothy, with timid admiration. "I was terrified."

She smiled in a half-hypnotized fashion at the intrepid Leo, who took not the slightest notice. Archibald disliked him more and more.

"Thirty-five miles an hour!" he exclaimed, shaking a playful finger. "What would my parishioners say? I hope you did not run over any of them."

"We flattened out two or three ducklings outside a cottage about a mile from here," replied the intrepid one. "A bumpkin of a policeman saw us, and had the impudence to blow his whistle. Luckily I had my identification number covered with mud."

"You ought to have stopped, Leo," said Dorothy.

Mr. Gillibrand replied with a cold stare, which brought a blush to his beloved's cheek and nearly converted a small blancmange, which James was handing round, from a comestible into a missile.

Suddenly an inspiration came to Archibald the Erratic.

He pushed back his chair, and fitting the tips of his fingers together after the traditional manner of stage clerics, addressed the couple before him.

"Now, my dear young people, with regard to the—ah—pleasant ceremony which is to take place this afternoon. I have already explained to you that certain formalities will be necessary, connected with a Special Licence, and Doctor's Commons, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and so on. Mere matters of form, but you know what red-tape is! John!"

James came briskly to attention.

"Hand me the telegraph forms from off that writing-table in the window, please," said Archibald, and resumed:

"I propose telegraphing to His Grace for the necessary permission. It is a purely mechanical business; I need not even give your names. Ah, thank you, John!" He took the telegraph forms and proceeded to write. "Put on your hat, like a good fellow, and take this to the village. Let me see: *Cantuar, London*, is sufficient address, I think." He handed the form to his dazed friend. "Can you read it, John?"

James glanced through the message. It said:

"Tell village policeman that man who ran over ducklings is here, and be quick about it, my lad!"

"Is that legible?" he asked.

James emitted a muffled sound and departed.

"A strange, reticent fellow," observed Archibald to his guests. "His tonsils are most unreliable, but he has a heart of gold. Shall we go into the garden? The birds are singing again. Indeed, yes!" He cooed, and rose to his feet. "The answer to the telegram," he continued, "should be here within the hour, leaving ample time for the ceremony. I also expect a clerical friend about that time. Doubtless he will be glad to assist me, and so make assurance doubly sure!"

He led the way into the garden. He was still in a condition of utter ignorance as to how this escapade was to end; but he intended, if all else failed, to transfer the ensuing unpleasantness to the innocent shoulders of The Old Flick. Meanwhile, he calculated, the village policeman would incorporate an artistic element of complication into the afternoon's entertainment.

IV

Suddenly, as the trio strolled in constrained silence down an aisle of high hollyhocks, there came to their ears a crunching sound upon the gravel of the drive, and a small governess cart, drawn by a fat grey pony, entered the vicarage gateway and proceeded in the direction of the stable. The driver of the cart had his back turned, but Archibald could see that he wore a soft black clerical hat. The Old Flick had arrived, and the cast was completed.

"I rather fancy that it is my dear friend Windrum," he announced. "Forgive me if I leave you for a moment. You will doubtless bear my absence with fortitude!" He smiled archly. "The raspberries are at your disposal." With a pontifical gesture of benediction he turned and walked in the direction of the house. This would be a surprise for The Old Flick.

He entered the library through the veranda windows. Before him, in the cool shade of the hall beyond, he beheld the tall, black-coated figure of the gentleman to whom he was acting as understudy. His principal's back was turned, and he was gazing dumbly through the open door into the adjoining dining-room, where the *débris* of the recent feast were still visible.

The Old Flick's attention, however, was immediately distracted from this spectacle by a shattering blow upon the spine, followed by a thunderous greeting. He whirled round and faced his demonstrative assailant.

He was not The Old Flick at all.

Archibald the Erratic was stricken dumb for perhaps five seconds; then he put out a friendly hand.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I consider it most neighbourly of you to have called. Sit down, won't you?"

The stranger, a severe-looking man of about fifty, wearing spectacles over which beetling brows bent threateningly, declined the proffered hand, and faced the intruder with great deliberation.

"My name," he said, "is Septimus Pontifex."

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Pontifex," said Archibald cordially. And reaching down a box from

the mantelpiece, he offered Mr. Pontifex one of his own cigarettes.

"May I inquire," said Pontifex, in a low, vibrating voice, "what you are doing in my house?"

"Your house?" replied Archibald with a rather uncertain smile. "Come, I like that!"

"You are pleased to be facetious, sir!" retorted Mr. Pontifex angrily. His spinal cord was still quivering. "If this house is not my actual property, it is mine in effect, so long as I remain Mr. Windrum's *locum tenens*."

So that was it! Archibald surveyed the swelling figure before him thoughtfully. He had better explain at once. No; on second thoughts he would wait a little. This was evidently a quarrelsome and inhospitable fellow—very different from The Flick—unworthy of great consideration. What would be an appropriate way of——

He was recalled from his meditations by the alarming demeanour of Pontifex, whose gaze for the last half-minute had been concentrated upon a small crimson, circular object upon the right-hand leg of Archibald's trousers. It was a spot of sealing-wax. Now he pointed a trembling finger, and almost screamed:

"What do you mean, sir, by wearing my clothes? I recognize my trousers: do not deny it! I made that spot of sealing-wax myself, last night."

"Yes, Pontifex," replied Archibald in a soothing voice, "I am sure you did. You invent your own games, and play them by yourself. Very clever and resourceful!"

"Do not trifle with me, sir!" boomed Pontifex. "You are wearing my trousers: I *know* they are mine!"

Archibald shook his head mournfully.

"Really, Pontifex, really!" he said. "I had heard stories, of course, but I had no idea things were as bad as this. No wonder the dear Bishop was getting anxious." He patted the astonished man upon the shoulder. "My poor friend, can't you do anything—*anything*? My heart bleeds for you."

Archibald choked—not from emotion, but from inability to decide what to say next. Mr. Pontifex saved him further trouble by turning on his heel and walking swiftly out of the room and upstairs. Presently he could be heard overhead, seeking confirmatory evidence in his rifled dressing-room.

Archibald lit a cigarette, strolled to the window, and

looked out into the garden. Presently Septimus Pontifex came striding downstairs again, and stood framed in the doorway.

"You are a thief, sir," he announced, "and an impostor. I do not know who you are or where you come from, but I presume that the motor-bicycle which I noticed in the stables is yours. I shall now lock you in this room and send for a constable."

"Do not put yourself to such trouble, my dear Mr. Pontifex," Archie replied. "I have already done so." He extended a hand and drew the bemused Pontifex to the window. "In fact, I see he has arrived."

v

Dorothy Venner was still enough of a child to appreciate being left alone with the raspberries. But this afternoon her appetite was gone—which was not altogether surprising. Eloping is like riding a bicycle: you must go full speed ahead all the time, or you will begin to wobble. Dorothy was of a romantic disposition and barely twenty. She had been attracted by Mr. Gillibrand's dark eyes and lofty attitude towards his fellow-creatures; and the fact that a peppery papa and a philistine elder brother had described her paragon as an effeminate young Nancy and a mangy little swine respectively had been in itself sufficient to convince her that she loved him to distraction. But, as already indicated, you cannot take an elopement *andante*. Dorothy was wobbling badly. The sunny, peaceful garden did not soothe her at all. She wanted to cry. She wanted to scream. Above all, she wanted someone to confide in.

Furtively, almost fearfully, she peeped through the raspberry canes to observe the movements of her beloved. He was wandering—one had almost said slouching—along a gravel path not fifteen yards away. Suddenly he halted, stiffened, and gave a startled glance in the direction of the house. Then he ducked, and, running with quite surprising swiftness, in the attitude of a Red Indian on the war-trail, dived into a large rhododendron bush and disappeared from sight.

Dorothy was too astonished to move or cry out. Now she was conscious of the thump of elephantine feet upon the

grass close by, and next moment the explanation of Lionel's peculiar conduct revealed itself in the form of a policeman—the largest policeman she had ever seen.

Now although we are pleased to be humorous upon the subject of policemen, it is in a spirit of pure bravado. Secretly we are all afraid of them: our upbringing at the hands of unscrupulous under-nurses has ensured that. Whether we are stealing jam or engaging in an elopement, the policeman is ever at the back of our thoughts. Dorothy trembled guiltily.

The policeman addressed her. He was a stout, jolly-looking man, and in his leisure moments was much in request at home as a minder of the baby. He was painfully conscious of this infirmity, and in the execution of his duty endeavoured to nullify it as far as possible. He spoke in a deep monotone, and his language was formal and official.

"Good afternoon, miss. I am informed that the gentleman what passed through Popleigh village about two-thirty p.m. to-day riding a motor-cycle with side-car attached is on these 'ere premises can you give me any information as to his whereabouts?"

"He is somewhere about the garden, I think," gasped Dorothy.

The policeman thanked her, and passed on. Dorothy watched him out of sight, and then turned and ran blindly in the direction of the house, straight into the arms of Captain James Pryor. He was wearing his own clothes, and had discarded his make-up.

Dorothy started back with an hysterical little cry.

"Jim!" she whispered. "You?"

"Yes," said Jim simply—"just me."

Dorothy gave him both her hands.

"Jim, dear," she said, "I'm in awful trouble. I have been a little imbecile."

"Oh, not at all!" said James tenderly.

"Yes, I have!" insisted Dorothy.

"No, you *haven't*!" said James. "I tell you, I know about imbeciles. I've been spending the day with one."

Miss Venner abandoned the argument, and wept comfortably, with her forehead resting upon Jim's broad chest.

"I'm ashamed to look you in the face," she sobbed.

"Never mind," replied James, passing a protecting arm

round her. "Have a look at my waistcoat instead : it's been greatly admired in its time. Now, what's your trouble ?"

"It's a long story," said Dorothy ; "but I simply must tell——"

"Don't you tell me any stories you don't need to," interposed James swiftly. "I'm not an inquisitive sort of feller. . . . That's a wretched little handkerchief of yours : try mine !" He deprived Miss Venner of a small scrap of lawn and handed her a prismatic bandana.

"Now, cut out the explanations, and tell me what you want me to do," he said.

"I want you to take me away from this place. Back to Tuckleford—anywhere !" said Dorothy with a shuddering glance over her shoulder in the direction of the rhododendron bush.

"Righto !" replied James, who was always happy when there was plenty to do and nothing to say. "Let's go to the stable and start up your little friend's buzz-wagon. . . . By Jove, there's someone coming out of the veranda window now. Run !" He seized his lady-love by the arm and fairly whirled her into the stable yard.

VI

Septimus Pontifex, dazed and bewildered, crossed the lawn and approached the raspberry canes, accompanied by Archibald. Ten yards behind followed an elderly female, carrying three dead ducklings. She had been brought to the Vicarage as principal witness for the prosecution, and, growing tired of waiting in the road outside, had decided to take a more intimate part in the proceedings.

The policeman had extracted Lionel Gillibrand from the rhododendron bush ; and having produced a notebook and pencil from the interior of his chest, was well embarked upon a searching but stereotyped inquiry into his prisoner's identity and antecedents, when he became aware that two gentlemen in clerical dress—one elderly and lowering like a thunder-cloud, the other young and struggling with acute hysteria—had included themselves in the interview. Slightly flustered, he touched his helmet and returned to his cross-examination.

"Your name and address ?" he repeated.

"You have no right to ask for it," persisted Lionel uneasily. "The law cannot touch me in this matter."

"You name and address?" reiterated the policeman, with the steady insistency of a man who has the whole British Constitution at his back. "Surname? Christian name?"

"You had better give it, Mr. Gillibrand," advised the less sedate clergyman.

"Persons," corroborated the policeman, "charged with a offence against the law and withholdin' of their name and address when requested by a police officer is liable to be arrested summary. Now, my man, out with it!"

Lionel complied, sulkily.

"I say again," he added, "that the law cannot touch me in the matter. There was no compulsion or undue influence. It was a purely voluntary act."

The policeman ploughed on.

"I must ask you to show me your licence," he continued.

Lionel grasped at this straw.

"Certainly!" he replied triumphantly. "I have a Special Licence!"

The policeman scratched his ear in puzzled fashion, and then resorted to sarcasm.

"Special?" he said slowly. "What may a Special Licence be? Does it include liddle flappers?"

"Are you referring," inquired Leo furiously, "to my future——?"

"I am referrin'," replied the policeman doggedly, "to your licence."

"I tell you I have a Special Licence," shouted Lionel—"from the Archbishop of Canterbury." He turned to Archibald. "Has the telegram arrived yet?" he inquired feverishly.

"Not yet," replied Archibald.

"Touchin' this licence," persisted the adamantine policeman, "I don't see what no Archbishop of Canterbury has got to do with liddle flappers. Mrs. Challice, will you step this way?"

The elderly female with the corpses, who had been standing respectfully aloof, glided mechanically forward.

"I was a-sittin' outside my door, sir—" she began rapidly to Archibald.

"You will be charged—" announced the policeman to Mr. Gillibrand.

"Hallo ! What's that ?" exclaimed Archibald. From the drive came a whirring and a popping sound.

"It's my motor-cycle !" exclaimed Gillibrand.

"BG seven-oh-two," corroborated the policeman grimly. "I've got your number all right. *Here, stop !*"

Mr. Gillibrand was already half-way across the lawn. But he was too late. As he rounded the corner of the house his motor-cycle, carrying two passengers, swung out of the gate into the road and whizzed away, with a single derisive toot, in the direction of Tuckleford.

Desperately he sped after it. The policeman, stertorous but tenacious, followed. Last of all came the owner of the corpses, minus her evidence. Archibald the Erratic and Septimus Pontifex were left alone.

VII

"Well," announced Archie cheerfully, "that's that."

Mr. Pontifex turned majestically upon him.

"Sir," he announced, "I shall wait no longer——"

"Sorry you have to go," said Archibald, extending a friendly hand. "Look in again, won't you ?"

Mr. Pontifex ignored this hospitable invitation and continued :

"You have broken into my house ; you are masquerading in my clothes ; you have entertained a party of friends to luncheon at my expense ; and you have involved me in a grotesque and inexplicable brawl between a village policeman and an escaped criminal, to whom you have apparently promised a dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury. If you can explain all these things to me with any degree of plausibility I shall be grateful."

Archie, who possessed the saving grace—rare in irresponsible humorists—of knowing when a joke has gone far enough, complied. His explanation was characteristically involved, and abounded in irrelevance. But Pontifex's severe features had relaxed considerably ere he finished.

"Mr. Wade," he said—"if that be your name—I am inclined to accept your narrative as substantially correct, and I applaud your design to prevent this marriage, though your methods of execution are open to criticism. But you will

forgive me if I verify your statements by a direct reference to Mr. Windrum? I shall send a telegram——”

“I can save you the trouble,” replied Archibald.

“You seem to think of everything,” remarked Mr. Pontifex, with an indulgent smile. “Have you telegraphed yourself?”

“No, sir. My certificate of character is hanging in your own study.

Archibald crossed the veranda and disappeared. Presently he returned, carrying a framed photograph.

“My passport, sir, and certificate aforesaid,” he announced.

Mr. Pontifex examined the portrait—a young officer in the uniform of the Royal Air Force, inscribed: “*To The Old Flick, from Archibald the Erratic.*”

“I recognize it,” he said. “And you are Archibald the Erratic?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And The—er—Old Flick?”

“Mr. Windrum, sir. We were boys together. At that age we are apt to be thoughtless and inconsiderate in the nicknames that we bestow.”

“That is very true,” agreed Mr. Pontifex. “I remember, in my undergraduate days at Oxford——”

What Mr. Pontifex remembered will never be known, for at this moment there was a sound of turmoil outside, the garden gate clicked, and the policeman reappeared, holding Mr. Lionel Gillibrand by the collar. The lady of the ducklings appeared to have been unable to stay the course: at any rate, she was no longer visible.

“I’ve got him, sir!” announced the policeman to Archibald—whom, not altogether unreasonably, he appeared to regard as the president of the tribunal.

“Excellent, officer!” said Archibald approvingly. “Put him there.” He indicated a chair, into which the representative of the law proceeded to bump his prisoner. This done, the policeman again extracted the notebook from his bosom, and resumed:

“‘Attemptin’ to escape from custody amounts to resistin’ of the police in the execution of their duty. That makes the charge much more serious.’” He sucked his blunt pencil thoughtfully; then wrote. . . .

“You will now be charged with driving a mechanically-

propelled vehicle—to wit, one motor-cycle—along the Tuckleford Road to the common danger; exceeding of the speed-limit in a ten-mile control; destroying of live-stock—to wit, three flappers; refusing to stop when requested to do so by a police officer, and resisting of the police in the execution of their duty.” He shut the book with a snap. Lionel Gillibrand gazed at him incredulously.

“Do you mean to say—” he began.

The policeman held up a hand about the size of a small ham.

“Stop one minute!” he commanded. “I have some evidence here.” He dived under his chair and produced the corpses of the ducklings. “Three flappers! That’s what you’re wanted for, my man!”

“Do you mean to say,” inquired Gillibrand, in a voice of mingled indignation and relief, “that that is all?”

“And quite enough too!” retorted the policeman, obviously more than a little piqued.

“But—but—I thought——”

Archibald intervened swiftly.

“Yes, that is all, Mr. Gillibrand. If you have any other crime on your conscience—well, forget it! Next Monday you will be penalized forty shillings or a month by the local beaks, like any other ordinary little road-hog, for running over three ducklings and resisting the police in the execution of their duty. I wouldn’t have the charge made more—romantic than that, if I were you. Believe me, it’s not done! See?”

Gillibrand favoured him with a lingering and malevolent glare; then turned away sulkily. Archibald rose to his feet.

“I suppose this gentleman is at liberty to leave us now, officer?” he said.

“I shall not require him further,” replied the policeman grandly—“for a day or two.”

VIII

Archibald the Erratic accompanied Mr. Gillibrand to the gate, and pointed out to that depreciated Lochinvar the nearest way to the railway station. He returned to find the Rector sitting alone in the veranda.

"Has our policeman left us?" Archibald asked.

"My housekeeper," replied Mr. Pontifex, "who has just returned from an afternoon visit to her sister, is supplying him with refreshment in the kitchen. Mr. Wade, I think you handled the delicate matter of the true reason of Mr. Gillibrand's presence here with great discrimination. I am glad now I trusted to my own judgment and allowed you to conduct the case in your own way. Will you remain and join us at supper?"

"Yourself and your housekeeper?" inquired Archibald, politely temporizing until he should find a way of escape from what promised to be a somewhat parochial evening.

"Oh, dear no! My housekeeper is a person of quite humble station. Myself and my daughter."

"Your daughter?"

"Precisely. Possibly I have not informed you that I am so blessed. There she is, coming in at the garden gate now. She has been to a garden-party."

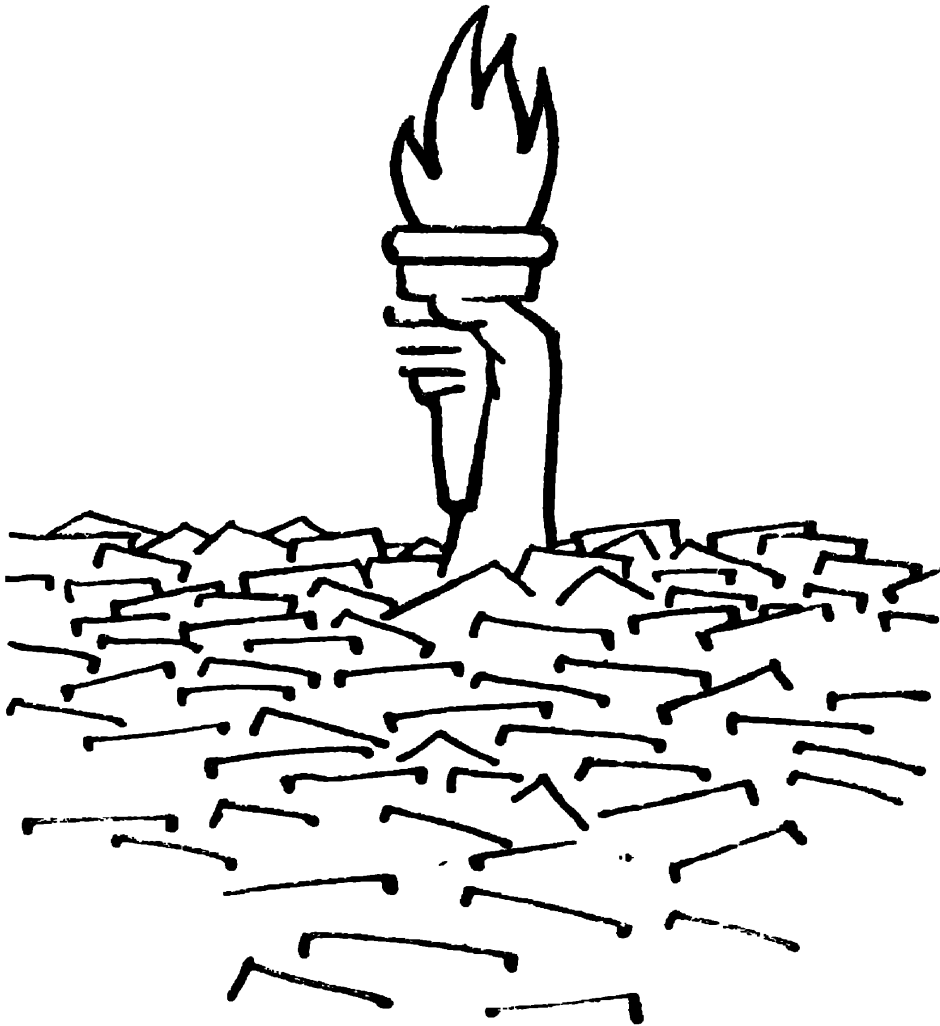
Archibald turned quickly. In the open gateway stood a girl—fair-haired, slender, dressed in white, her face shaded by a large black-lace hat. There was a bunch of pink carnations at her belt. On seeing her father engaged in amicable conversation with a young and eminently presentable brother of the cloth, she broke into a smile. Archibald, who was an observant young man, noted she had a dimple in her left cheek. Concurrently, he was conscious of a slight shortness of breath.

"You will stay to supper, then?" said Mr. Pontifex.

Archibald the Erratic bowed his head reverentially, and uttered the first serious words of a frivolous career:

"I will!"

THE LEG-PULLER



“BARTIMEUS”

"BARTIMEUS" is the name under which Paymaster-Commander Ricci, R.N., who is now serving in the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert*, writes his vivid stories of naval life. *Naval Occasions*, *A Tall Ship* and *Unreality* are the best known of his books.

THE LEG-PULLER

GOVERNMENT departments have been known in their lighter moments to exchange departmental jests. But the individual is not encouraged to be funny at their expense. It has been attempted from time to time ; but this is a game in which he who laughs last laughs loudest. And the Government department generally laughs last. There is, however, an exception to every rule of life. The exception in the instance I am about to relate was John Octavius Peglar, citizen of the United States of America. For him was reserved the peculiar distinction of having pulled the leg of the British Admiralty—or, anyhow, one of its departments—and he “got away with it.”

He did not look a humorist. Few really funny people do. Moreover, he had no intention of being funny at the Admiralty's expense—up to a point. The Admiralty plainly asked for it. The doubt in my mind is the precise point at which John Octavius decided to give them what they asked for.

He was an urbane, clean-shaven little man, wearing rimless pince-nez, precise and business-like in an unobtrusive way, as befitted the head of a big American business firm giving occupation, chiefly in accountancy, to some hundreds of employees, and controlling several millions of dollars.

John Peglar was in London, transacting business on behalf of his firm, when Great Britain declared war on Germany. Apart from business considerations Mr. Peglar decided this did not call for any active steps on his part. He was perfectly content to let Great Britain and Germany fight while he continued to transact business. But one fine day the *Lusitania* was sunk, and Mr. Peglar awoke to certain vital aspects of the brawl he had not hitherto considered. He gave his own country forty-eight hours, and then approached a certain influential Englishman of his

acquaintance, with whom he spent a quarter of an hour in private conversation. Emerging from his friend's office he dispatched two cables: one to his business partner in New York, the other to his wife. He then walked to the Admiralty and sent his card up to an official, with a note from his friend. The official looked up from the note as Mr. Peglar was admitted, and scowled at him.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

"I understand you are a Canadian?"

"Er—yes," said Mr. Peglar.

"And you wish to join the British Navy as a Paymaster in the Royal Naval Reserve, having failed for the Army on account of eyesight?"

"Yes," said Mr. Peglar again.

"Have you any experience of accountancy?"

"I know the first four rules of arithmetic," was the modest reply from the head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland.

"So much the better. How would you like to be the Paymaster of an armed Boarding Steamer?"

"I could tell you better after I'd been one for a while."

"It's of no consequence. You will be appointed to-night. Please leave your address. Good morning."

"Good morning." In the courtyard outside Mr. Peglar stopped and gazed up at the soot-grimed windows from which King Charles the First had emerged on to the scaffold. A pigeon swooped past, nearly brushing his shoulders with its wings. "Marvellous!" said Mr. Peglar in an awed voice. Whether he referred to the tameness of the pigeon, or the historical associations of his surroundings, or his recent interview, I am unable to say.

Once more that day Mr. Peglar gave vent to the same expression of emotion, when some hours after he had visited a Naval outfitter, a cardboard box was delivered at the hotel where he was staying. He bore it up to his room, and in its rococo privacy surveyed himself with an expressionless countenance in front of a long mirror, garbed in the uniform of a British Naval Officer.

"Marvellous!" repeated Mr. Peglar.

This is not a war story, or one might be tempted to enlarge on some of Mr. Peglar's early experiences, assisting to conduct a blockade of the German coast. Doubtless he

found them marvellous, although he did not say so. Nothing, not even seasickness, shook his imperturbable and enigmatical urbanity. But on the subject of the British naval system of accountancy he permitted himself some comments to the Leading Victualling Assistant, who composed his Staff. He spent a forenoon examining the ledger, cash, clothing and victualling accounts, the butt of a cigar between his teeth.

He sighed as he closed the last book. "I stood not long ago beneath the window out of which King Charles the First stepped to execution. I was conscious of the associations with the past which surround Englishmen so closely on all sides. This goes one better. This links one up with Noah and the Ark. It's a fine system, but cumbersome."

"Yessir," said the Leading Victualling Assistant without the least idea what Mr. Peglar was talking about, and bore the books away.

Mr. Peglar found that the task of feeding, clothing, and paying a ship's company of fifty souls did not present any very unusual difficulties. He kept the ledger, checked the Leading Victualling Assistant's accounts, rendered interminable and apparently purposeless returns to the Admiralty. In leisure moments he perused, the inevitable cigar between his teeth, a massive tome that appeared to afford him inexhaustible interest. It was called "The King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions."

Thus two months passed when a cloud rose above the horizon of Mr. Peglar's serenity. A deputation waited on him from the Lower Deck with a request for fresh meat. Owing to the service on which the ship was employed and the fact that she was not fitted with a refrigerator, officers and men had been compelled to subsist chiefly on tinned comestibles.

The ship being still at sea, out of sight of land, Mr. Peglar thought the request somewhat unreasonable. The British bluejacket was new to him. He temporized with the deputation and promised them their fill of fresh meat the first time the ship communicated with the land. He reported the interview to the Captain. "They tell me they wouldn't be surprised if scurvy broke out 'most any time," concluded Mr. Peglar, eyeing his Commanding Officer through his glasses with impenetrable gravity. The Captain, an

ex-Merchant Service Skipper holding a Commander's Commission in the Royal Naval Reserve, burst into a guffaw. "Scurvy, my foot. They've fed like lords ever since the war started; I'd like some of 'em to have been at sea with me when I was a youngster. Windjammers. . . . Scurvy! Well, well! Still, we've got to keep 'em happy, I suppose. We shall be near an island in the Northern Hebrides by noon tomorrow. I'll lower a boat and you can go ashore and see what you can do."

Accordingly, the following day the ship hove to, and Mr. Peglar, after a perilous passage which nearly ended in the boat being dashed to pieces on the rocks, landed on a desolate and barren island. He approached the only habitation in sight, a cottage built of turf with a reed thatch. An old deaf woman came to the door, and Mr. Peglar explained his mission. The old woman understood only Gaelic, and was under the impression that the island was being raided by Germans. The subsequent negotiations took some time, but Mr. Peglar succeeded in conveying his requirements and in paying for eight sheep. The old woman waved a wrinkled hand at the bleak hillside, indicating that her visitor might help himself.

Mr. Peglar went back and collected three of the boat's crew. With their aid he succeeded, after two hours and a half of the most violent physical exertion in his experience, in cornering five bleating muttons, and conveyed them, struggling wildly, to the boat. He broke his glasses in the course of the *mêlée*, and finally arrived on board dishevelled and exhausted, but mildly triumphant; his flock were collected in an improvised pen, and Mr. Peglar called for a volunteer butcher.

As has been said, he was new to that most baffling of all human enigmas, the processes of the blue-jacket's mind. Within five minutes of their arrival on board the sheep had been adopted by the ship's company, christened, ornamented with bows of ribbon, and fed variously upon cigarettes, condensed milk, tinned vegetables, and haricot beans. Mr. Peglar's supplications for their execution fell on shocked and outraged ears. They were the ship's pets, and not a hand would any man raise, except to fondle them.

John Octavius Peglar's jaw took a hard line. It was unfamiliar to his shipmates, but quite a number of men

in Wall Street would have recognized it and steered clear. He went down to the First Lieutenant's cabin. "Say, Number One," he said, standing in the doorway and breathing through his nostrils. "Say, can I borrow your automatic revolver?"

"What's up?" inquired the startled First Lieutenant.

"Well, these darned sailors asked for fresh meat"—Mr. Peglar slipped the weapon, which the other extended, into his pocket—"and—and *they're going to have it.*"

In due course, the sheep having been consumed, Mr. Peglar rendered his accounts to the Admiralty. They were models of what accounts should be, but in the eyes of Whitehall they lacked one essential detail. Mr. Peglar had omitted to take on charge, and expend by the simple process of throwing overboard, the "arisings" of the sheep.

Now "arisings" are an important item of Naval store accounts. They represent what is left over. For instance, the "arisings" of a candle is a puddle of wax, which is the property of the State. The "arisings" of the sheep after they had been skinned, cut up and eaten were also, properly speaking, the property of the State. In this and similar cases the State was prepared to waive the joys of actual possession provided it was made clear that they had not been disposed of in such a way as to benefit an individual. In other words, provided they were duly certified as thrown overboard. This Mr. Peglar, with his New World scorn for non-essentials, had omitted to do.

A few weeks elapsed and the accounts were returned with an official request that it might be stated by the Accountant Officer how the "arisings" of sheep, five in number, had been disposed of. Mr. Peglar was unfamiliar with the term. He summoned the Leading Victualling Assistant to explain. The Leading Victualling Assistant explained, in one terse Anglo-Saxon word that carried complete enlightenment.

"Well!" said Mr. Peglar. "They can search *me* for them. Do they think I've eaten them, anyway?"

"Couldn't say, sir," replied his Staff helpfully.

"I'll write and ask them," said Mr. Peglar, and did so.

The ensuing correspondence need not be repeated in detail. It reached its climax when Whitehall, having accused Mr. Peglar of attempting flippancy, was told by that urbane gentleman that they wouldn't have thought so if they had seen him handling the First Lieutenant's automatic revolver

in the sheep-pen. Then Whitehall wearied of the jest after the manner of a Great Government Department who felt that the thing had gone far enough. In curt official phraseology Mr. Peglar was bidden to account for the "arisings" or pay for them. Further, he was informed, in no uncertain terms, that the correspondence on the subject must cease. Whitehall then, deciding that it had laughed last, turned its attention to other matters.

Again Mr. Peglar's smooth jaw took on that ominous prominence. "No, sir!" said the head of the firm of Peglar and Ziegland. "Not my money. But if it's 'arisings' you want, you shall have them."

The ship was then at Dundee, refitting. Mr. Peglar went ashore and requested a policeman to direct him to the nearest slaughter-house. Here Mr. Peglar interviewed a gentleman in ensanguined overalls and explained his mission. "Equivalent to about five sheep," he concluded. The gentleman indicated a heap of assorted arisings and invited Mr. Peglar to help himself. Mr. Peglar filled five sacks and drove them down to the ship in a cab. Here he transferred the contents to a packing-case, nailed it up, and addressed it to the Admiralty Official whose signature ornamented the recent official correspondence. Then feeling in need of refreshment he repaired to the Wardroom.

The First Lieutenant proffered him an evening newspaper.

"America's entered the war," he said.

Mr. Peglar looked relieved. "Then I guess I'll get along and pack my grip." He rose and moved towards the door. The First Lieutenant looked surprised.

"Why? Where are you going?"

Mr. Peglar paused in the doorway.

"America," was the brief reply. "Right now." The curtain swung to behind him and a dry unfamiliar chuckle.

John Octavius Peglar had laughed last.

NO SALE



WALTER R. BROOKS

WALTER R. BROOKS has had a great success in America as a writer of humorous stories, and has recently had his first novel published in this country—*Ernestine Takes Over*.

NO SALE

ONCE upon a time there was a broker named George Plaskett. He had a nice house and a wife named Ethel and a seat on the Stock Exchange and a man to drive his car. He lived in Great Neck. He went into the city every day except Sunday when he stayed home and looked at his stamp collection which was in two big books on top of the piano. Every evening when they did not go out to a party the Plasketts turned on all the lights and had a party of their own.

Mr. Plaskett was very popular at parties because he could mix a great many different drinks without even looking them up in the book and because he always told the ladies the funny jokes the other brokers had told him during the day and the ladies told them to their husbands and everybody had a good laugh. All the people in Great Neck said What a lucky man Mr. Plaskett is to be sure.

Well, by and by hard times came along and Mr. Plaskett got worried. Nobody wanted any brokering done. He kept on going to the city every day but there wasn't anything to do and he spent his time looking at his stamp collection which he had taken in with him. The brokers didn't tell each other funny jokes any more and when he wanted some to tell at parties he had to look them up in old magazines and nobody laughed at them very much.

He didn't say anything to Mrs. Plaskett about the hard times but she guessed it one day when he told her she couldn't have the mink coat she said she wanted for Christmas. She got sort of mad. She said Why George Plaskett how can you sit there and say I can't have that coat when you promised it to me and I can prove you promised it by Mother because she was here and she heard you say it. And Mr. Plaskett said Your mother never stops talking long enough to hear

anything. And Mrs. Plaskett began to cry and went into her bedroom.

Now Mr. Plaskett needed ten thousand dollars very badly that day to save his business. So he sat down on a chair and said hell twice and then he got up and went into the bedroom and said Ethel I guess you don't know how bad things are brokers would all be committing suicide but they can't make enough to pay funeral expenses and I may even lose my stamp collection. I sent it over to Beebe and Beebe to-day to see if they would make me an offer for it. Oh what a pity said Mrs. Plaskett and she smiled in a funny way that Mr. Plaskett didn't like so he said oh dear helplessly and looked unhappy. But Mrs. Plaskett wouldn't look at him so he sighed very loud and went out in the other room and sat down and thought.

Well after about five minutes he had thought all the thoughts he could think of and Mrs. Plaskett hadn't come out to see him thinking and his stamp collection was at Beebe and Beebe's so he picked up a book. It was an old book on magic. It opened first at a page that had recipes on it with notes in Mrs. Plaskett's handwriting and he thought it was a cook book.

Then he read Take the juice of two spiders and a pinch of powdered thighbone of a parricide and he said That's funny and looked at the top of the page and read Love philtres and potions. He wasn't interested in that so he began looking at pictures of famous magicians mostly old men with beards and then he came to a chapter How to sell your soul to the devil. And he read There are many instances on record of great wealth having been attained by those who have made compacts with the evil one, and there were a number of pictures of the devil some with horns and a tail and others very ordinary looking so that you wouldn't have guessed they were anybody special.

Well Mr. Plaskett went on reading and by and by Mrs. Plaskett stuck her head out and said George what are you doing? And Mr. Plaskett said I am going to sell my soul to the devil. And Mrs. Plaskett said You'd better sell some stocks to your customers. Then Mr. Plaskett got mad and he said I've told you fifty times that they won't buy anything now and I don't know how to make money any other way and I don't want to lose my stamp collection. So Mrs. Plaskett said Well

go ahead and sell your old soul then such as it is you might as well get something out of it but for goodness' sake try to drive a decent bargain you know you're a fool at business. And she sniffed and shut the door.

.. Well Mr. Plaskett hadn't really been serious when he said he was going to sell his soul because he didn't know much about it or have any idea what it was worth. But Mrs. Plaskett made him mad and anyway maybe he could save his stamp collection. So he read over the directions and then he got some gin and put it in four saucers in the corners of the room and tried to light it. But it was the gin he used for company and wouldn't burn so he had to get a new bottle that had just come.

That burned nicely and then he drew pentacles and intertwining circles on the floor like the book said and then he stood in the middle with a lighted candle in his hand and read out loud from the book the magic words. He read them very loud so the devil would be sure to hear and just in the middle of it Mrs. Plaskett opened the door again and said George what on earth.

Oh said Mr. Plaskett please let me alone I told you what I was doing. And Mrs. Plaskett said I smelt gin, and Mr. Plaskett said Of course you did I have to use it in raising the devil. And Mrs. Plaskett said Well if you're going to raise the devil you might at least not do it in my living-room when I'm trying to sleep why don't you go out to the garage? And she sniffed and shut the door again. So Mr. Plaskett began all over again.

And when he got through nothing happened. There wasn't any clap of thunder and there wasn't any smell of brimstone only burned gin. Mr. Plaskett stood still for a minute with the candle in his hand looking foolish and then he began tidying up the room so Mrs. Plaskett wouldn't be cross at breakfast.

And just then the telephone-bell rang. He went to it and said Yes crossly and a far-off voice said Hello Plaskett this is the devil and I got your call but I had a lot of business in Washington and couldn't get there would it be all right if I dropped in to-morrow? And Mr. Plaskett said Sure come to lunch, and the voice said O K about one? and Mr. Plaskett said Swell I'll expect you and hung up and went to bed.

Well, Mr. Plaskett's mind was so full of the devil that he didn't sleep very well and he was late at the office next morning. His secretary said Good morning dear there are three men waiting to see you, and Mr. Plaskett said What do they look like? and the secretary said Oh just like three men—nobody I know, and Mr. Plaskett said Well I don't suppose the devil would send in his own name anyway, and the secretary laughed because she thought it was one of Mr. Plaskett's little jokes.

So the first man that came in was tall and dark and had a hooked nose and a little red feather in his hatband and Mr. Plaskett felt sure he was the devil. So he bowed and the man bowed and said speaking very quick Well Mr. Plaskett I assume you are still of the same mind about selling, and Mr. Plaskett said yes. And the man said Of course you understand that a lot of these things are being thrown on the market nowadays and I can't buy everything that is offered to me but I have looked yours over and I will offer you two thousand dollars. What said Mr. Plaskett tut tut that is no offer at all I imagine I know values better than that.

For he had thought that even if his soul wasn't worth 10,000 dollars he would try to get that for it because it was the exact sum he needed to save his business. Then the tall man talked a lot about how the market had sunk and about how even missionaries were almost a drug on the market and he said he knew it was hard to give up one's most cherished possessions but after all they didn't pay any interest and in these times an increase in value was doubtful.

That may be true said Mr. Plaskett but if you get it you'll pay me 10,000 dollars not a penny less. Three thousand said the man Not a cent more. Nine thousand said Mr. Plaskett. Take it or leave it. Four thousand said the man And that's my last word.

And so they agreed on seven thousand and the man wrote out a check and then he said You understand I am paying that much for only one reason because I want all those Hawaiian missionary stamps. What said Mr. Plaskett You are not the devil? And the man laughed and said No I am Mr. Beebe of Beebe and Beebe the stamp merchants you will have your joke Mr. Plaskett good morning.

Well well said Mr. Plaskett to himself That was pretty nice and I am glad he wasn't the devil because I only need

three thousand more and I ought to be able to get that much for my soul. Then the next man came in and he was a Mr. Peabody a fat man in a velour hat and Mr. Plaskett said to himself He doesn't look like the pictures in the book but it would be just like the devil to wear a velour hat and maybe he's him and he bowed politely.

Now Mr. Peabody was not the devil at all but an insurance man, and Mr. Plaskett's politeness was so unusual in his experience that he began to cry. Come come old chap said Mr. Plaskett and Mr. Peabody said, Oh dear please excuse me I'm really very happy my old aunt in Lansing died last week and left me 200,000 dollars and this is my last day selling insurance.

What you are an insurance salesman said Mr. Plaskett Out of my sight. No no shouted Mr. Peabody falling on his knees. Don't say it don't say it you are the first man who has been polite to me in forty years and long ago I made a vow that the first man who was really nice to me I would give half my fortune to if I ever had one and now I have one and half of it is yours. What said Mr. Plaskett You mean you will give me one hundred thousand dollars? Yes said Mr. Peabody and he took the fountain-pen he always had ready in his hand and made out a paper that said Mr. Plaskett was to have half his aunt's estate and shook hands and said good-bye.

Aha said Mr. Plaskett Now I have one hundred and seven thousand dollars and my soul is going up I shall not sell it for less than five hundred thousand dollars and a steam yacht. He looked at his watch and it was half past one and he said Well that last man out there must certainly be the devil because Satan always keeps his appointments. So the third man came in and he was a tough little man with a squint and no hair and Mr. Plaskett thought Well I suppose this is just one of the devil's disguises but where can we go to lunch so we won't be seen together? And he said Are you the devil? You said it said the little man Well maybe I ain't the head devil but the boss sent me around to sell you some protection Just sign this and everything will be O K.

And he handed Mr. Plaskett a paper which would bind him to pay the Brokers' Protective Association ten dollars monthly for life. But Mr. Plaskett laid the paper down without looking at it and said Well you go pretty fast but understand now I

am to have five hundred thousand dollars and a steam yacht in good order or there's no deal. And the little man said Geest you're nuts come on buddy sign the paper. How'd you like to come home some night and find your house all blown to hell?

And Mr. Plaskett said It has its points but how about that half million have you got it with you? Then the little man got down off the desk where he had been sitting and put his hand in his pocket and edged toward the door and growled Geest what the boss mean sending me to shake down a looney? And Mr. Plaskett said Are you really the devil? The little man said Sure don't kid yourself. All right said Mr. Plaskett, Then vanish. And as the little man didn't say anything Mr. Plaskett said Come on do some tricks.

Well the little man didn't do any tricks just stood and showed his teeth so Mr. Plaskett said Well I guess you aren't him after all but I can prove it. And he began to say in a loud voice the formula he had read in the book which would make the devil disappear. And when the little man heard the Latin words he turned pale and ran out of the office screaming I can't do business with no looney and I won't what's more.

Well Mr. Plaskett waited a while longer but nobody else called and he said to himself Well I guess the devil changed his mind but it's all right with me I have enough money anyway. So he went out to lunch.

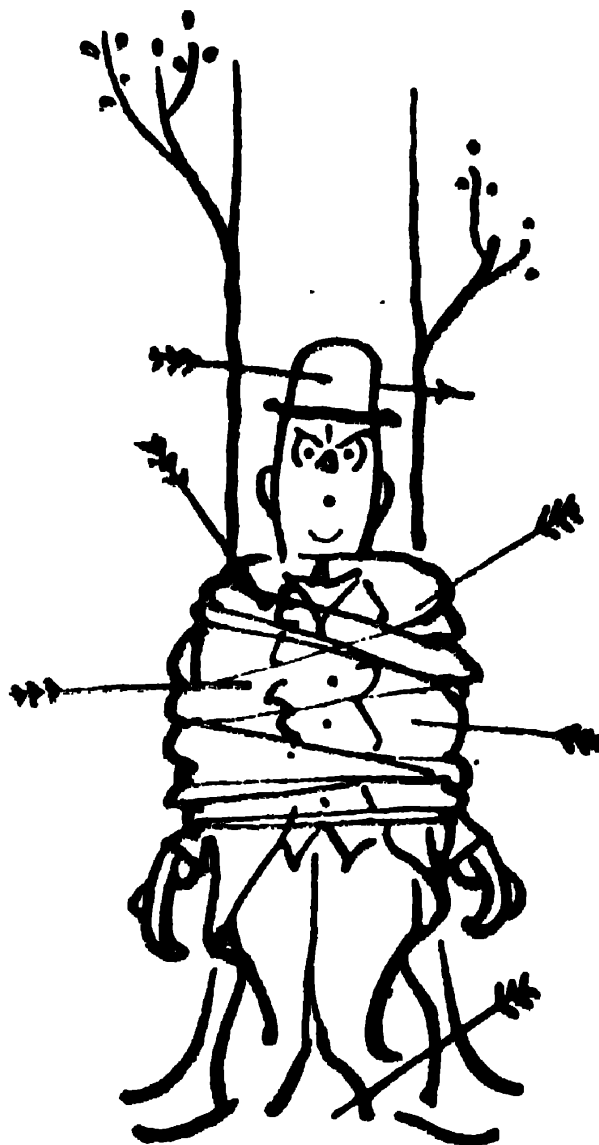
A little while after lunch he started home because it was pretty slow in the office without his stamp collection to look at. When he got there the cook came in and said What'll I do about dinner? And Mr. Plaskett said What do you mean do about dinner? And the cook said Well there was a dark complected gentleman called this noon he said he was to have lunch with you and you weren't here so Mrs. Plaskett invited him to stay.

My goodness said Mr. Plaskett, where did he go? He thought I meant the house and not the office. And the cook said I don't know Him and the missis went away about three and said to tell you they wouldn't be back and so what shall I do about dinner? And Mr. Plaskett said Serve it serve it he's got her and maybe I'm . . . sorry . . . and maybe I'm not and he went into the living-room. There was a strong smell of brimstone in the living-room and chairs and tables

were knocked every which way. I'm glad she put up a good fight said Mr. Plaskett and lit a cigar.

Well that was the last he ever heard of either Mrs. Plaskett or the devil and he still had his soul and didn't have to buy a mink coat. And he took some of the money from Mr. Peabody's aunt's estate to start a new stamp collection.

A GOOD ACTION



STACY AUMONIER

STACY AUMONIER, one of the most brilliant recent writers of short stories, was an artist of great talent, and also a popular society entertainer before he began writing. Some of his best stories are contained in the volume
Miss Bracegirdle and Others.

A GOOD ACTION

IT is undoubtedly true that the majority of us perform the majority of our actions through what are commonly known as mixed motives.

It would certainly have been quite impossible for Mr. Edwin Potheary to analyze the concrete impulse which eventually prompted him to perform his good action. It may have been a natural revolt from the somewhat petty and cramped punctilio of his daily life; his drab home life, the bickering, wearing, grasping routine of the existence of fish-and-chips dispenser. A man who earns his livelihood by buying fish and potatoes in the cheapest market, and selling them in the Waterloo Road, cannot afford to indulge his altruistic fancies to any lavish extent. It is true that the business of Mr. Edwin Potheary was a tolerably successful one—he employed three assistants and a boy named Scales who was not so much an assistant as an encumbrance and wholesale plate-smasher. Mr. Potheary engaged him because he thought his name seemed appropriate to the fish-trade. In a weak moment he pandered to this sentimental whim, another ingredient in the strange composition which influences us to do this, that, and the other. But it was not by pandering to whims of this nature that Mr. Potheary had built up this progressive and odoriferous business with its gay shop-front of blue and brown tiles. It was merely a minor lapse. In the fish-and-chip trade one has to be keen, pushful, self-reliant, ambidextrous, a student of human nature, forbearing, far-seeing, imaginative, courageous, something of a controversialist with a streak of fatalism as pronounced as that of a high-priest in a Brahmin temple. It is better, moreover, to have an imperfect nasal organism, and to be religious.

Edwin had all these qualities. Every day he went from Quince Villa at Buffington to London—forty minutes in the train—and back at night. On Sunday he took the wife and

three children to the Methodist Chapel at the corner of the street to both morning and evening service. But even this religious observance does not give us a complete solution for the sudden prompting of an idea to do a good action. Edwin had attended chapel for fifty-two years and such an impulse had never occurred to him before. He may possibly have been influenced by some remark of the preacher, or was it that twinge of gout which set him thinking of the unwritten future? Had it anything to do with the Boy-Scout movement? Someone at some time had told him of an underlying idea—that every day in one's life one should do one pure, good and unselfish action.

Perhaps after all it was all due to the gaiety of a spring morning. Certain it is that as he swung out of the garden gate on that morning in April something stirred in him. His round puffy face blinked heavenwards. Almond blossoms fluttered in the breeze above the hedge-rows. Larks were singing. . . . Suddenly his eye alighted upon the roof of the Peel's hen-house opposite, and Mr. Edwin Potheary scowled. Lord! how he hated those people! The Peels were Potheary's *bête-noires*. Snobs! Pirates! Rotters!

The Peel's villa was at least three times as big as the Potheary's. It was, in fact, not a villa at all. It was a "court"—whatever that was! It was quite detached, with about fourteen rooms in all, a coach-house, a large garden, and two black sheds containing forty-five fowls, leading an intensive existence. The Pothearys had five fowls which sometimes did and sometimes didn't supply them with two or three eggs a day, but it was known that the Peels sent at least two hundred and fifty eggs to market every week, besides supplying their own table. Mr. Peel was a successful dealer in quills and bristles. His wife was the daughter of a post office official, and they had three stuck-up daughters who would have no truck at all with the Pothearys. You may appreciate then the twinge of venom which marked the face of Edwin as he passed through his front gate and observed the distant roof of the Peel's fowl-house. And still the almond blossom nodded at him above the hedge. The lark sang. . . . After all, was it fair to hate anyone because they were better off than oneself? Strange how these moods obsess one. The soft air caressed Edwin's cheek. Little white flecks of cloud scudded gaily into the suburban

panorama. Small green shoots were appearing everywhere. One ought not to hate anyone at all—of course. It is absurd. So bad for oneself, apart from the others. One ought rather to be kind, forgiving, loving all mankind. Was that a lark or a thrush? He knew little about birds. Fish now! . . . A not entirely unsatisfactory business really the fried fish trade—when things went well. When customers were numerous and not too cantankerous. Quite easy to run, profitable. A boy came singing down the road. The villas clustered together more socially. There was the movement of spring life. . . .

As Edwin turned the corner of the Station Road, the impulse crystallized. One good action. To-day he would perform one good, kind, unselfish, unadvertised action. No one should ever know of it. Just one to-day. Then perhaps one to-morrow. And so on; in time it might become a habit. That is how one progressed. He took his seat in the crowded third-class smoker and pretended to read his newspaper, but his mind was too actively engaged with the problems of this new resolution. How? When? Where? How does one do a definitely good action? What is the best way to go to work? One could, of course, just quietly slip some money into a poor-box if one could be found. But would this be very good and self-sacrificing? Who gets money put in a poor-box? Surely his own family were poor enough, as far as that went. But he couldn't go back home and give his wife a sovereign. It would be advertising his charity, and he would look silly doing it. His business? He might turn up and say to his assistants: "Boys, you shall all have a day's holiday. We'll shut up, and here's your pay for the day." Advertising again; besides, what about the hundreds of poor workers in the neighbourhood who relied for their mid-day sustenance on "Pothecary's Pride-of-the-Ocean Popular Plaice to eat." It would be cruel, cruel and—bad for business in the future. The public would lose confidence in that splendid gold-lettered tablet in the window which said "Cod, brill, halibut, plaice, pilchards always on hand. Eat them or take them away."

The latter sentence did not imply that if you took them away you did *not* eat them; it simply meant that you could either stand at the counter and eat them from a plate with the aid of a fork and your fingers (or at one of the wooden

benches if you could find room—an unlikely contingency), alternatively you could wrap them up in a piece of newspaper and devour them without a fork at the corner of the street.

No, it would not be a good action in any way to close the Popular Place to eat. Edwin came to the conclusion that to perform this act satisfactorily it were better to divorce the proceeding entirely from any connection with home or business. The two things didn't harmonize. A good action must be a special and separate effort in an entirely different setting. He would take the day off himself and do it thoroughly.

Mr. Potheary was known in the neighbourhood of the Waterloo Road as "The Stinker," a title easily earned by the peculiar qualities of his business and the obvious additional fact that a Potheary was a chemist. He was a very small man, bald-headed with yellowy-white side whiskers, a blue chin, a perambulating nostril with a large wart on the port side. He wore a square bowler hat which seemed to thrust out the protruding flaps of his large ears. His greeny-black clothes were always too large for him and ended in a kind of a thick spiral above his square-toed boots. He always wore a flat white collar—more or less clean—and no tie. This minor defect was easily atoned for by a heavy silver chain on his waistcoat from which hung gold seals and ribbons connecting with watches, knives, and all kinds of ingenious appliances in his waistcoat pockets.

The noble intention of his day was a little chilled on his arrival at the shop. In the first place, although customers were then arriving for breakfast, the boy Scales was slopping water over the front step. Having severely castigated the miscreant youth and prophesied that his chances of happiness in the life to come were about as remote as those of a dead dog-fish in the upper reaches of the Thames, he made his way through the customers to the room at the back, and there he met Dolling.

Dolling was Edwin's manager, and he cannot be overlooked. In the first place, he was remarkably like a fish himself. He had the same dull expressionless eyes and the drooping mouth, and drooping moustache. Everything about him drooped and dripped. He was always wet. He wore a grey flannel shirt and no collar or tie. His braces, trousers and hair all seemed the same colour. He hovered in the background with a knife, and did the cutting up and

dressings. He had, moreover, all the taciturnity of a fish, and its peculiar ability for getting out of a difficulty. He never spoke. He simply looked lugubrious, and pointed at things with his knife. And yet Edward knew that he was an excellent manager. For it must be observed that in spite of the gold-lettered board outside with its fanfare of cod, brill, halibut, plaice and pilchards, whatever the customer asked for, by the time it had passed through Dolling's hands it was just *fish*. No nonsense about it at all. Just plain fish levelled with a uniform brown crust. If you asked for cod you got *fish*. If you asked for halibut you also got *fish*. Dolling was something of an artist.

On this particular morning, as Edwin entered the back room, Dolling was scratching the side of his head with the knife he used to cut up the fish; a sure sign that he was perplexed about something. It was not customary to exchange greetings in this business, and when he observed "the governor" enter he just withdrew the knife from his hair and pointed it at a packing-case on the side table. Edwin knew what this meant. He went up and pressed his flat nose right against the chest of what looked like an over-worked amphibian that had been turned down by its own Trade Union. Edwin sneezed before he had had time to withdraw his nose.

"Yes, that's a dud lot," he said. And then suddenly an inspirational moment nearly overwhelmed him. Here was a chance. He would turn to Dolling and say:

"Dolling, this fish is slightly tainted. We must throw it away. We bought it at our risk. Yesterday morning when it arrived it was just all right, but keeping it in that hot room downstairs where you and your wife sleep has probably finished it. We mustn't give it to our customers. It might poison them—ptomaine poison, you know . . . eh, Dolling?" It would be a good action, a self-sacrificing action, eh? But when he glanced at the face of Dolling he knew that such an explosion would be unthinkable. It would be like telling a duck it mustn't swim, or an artist that he mustn't paint, or a boy on a beach that he mustn't throw stones in the sea. It was the kind of a job that Dolling enjoyed. In the course of a few hours he knew quite well that whatever he said, the mysterious and evil-smelling monster would be served out in dainty parcels of halibut, cod, brill, plaice, etc.

Business was no place for a good action. Too many

others depended on it, were involved in it. Edwin went up to Dolling and shouted in his ear—he was rather deaf :

“I’m going out. I may not be back to-day.”

Dolling stared at the wall. He appeared about as interested in the statement as a cod might be that had just been informed that a Chinese coolie had won the Calcutta sweepstake. Edwin crept out of the shop abashed. He felt horribly uncomfortable. He heard someone mutter : “Where’s The Stinker off to ?” and he realized how impossible it would be to explain to anyone there present that he was off to do a good action.

“I will go to some outlying suburb,” he thought.

Once outside in the sunshine he tried to get back into the benign mood. He travelled right across London and made for Golder’s Green and Hendon, a part of the world foreign to him. By the time he had boarded the Golder’s Green bus he had quite recovered himself. It was still a brilliant day. “The better the day the better the deed,” he thought aptly. He hummed inaudibly ; that is to say, he made curious crooning noises somewhere behind his silver chain and cygnets ; the sound was happily suppressed by the noise of the bus.

It seemed a very long journey. It was just as they were going through a rather squalid district near Cricklewood that the golden chance occurred to him. The fares had somewhat thinned. There were scarcely a dozen people in the bus. Next to him, barely a yard away, he observed a poor woman with a baby in her arms. She had a thin, angular, wasted face, and her clothes were threadbare but neat. A poor, thoroughly honest and deserving creature, making a bitter fight of it against the buffets of a cruel world. Edwin’s heart was touched. Here was his chance. He noticed that from her wrist was suspended a shabby black bag, and the bag was open. He would slip up near her and drop in a half-crown. What joy and rapture when she arrived home and found the unexpected treasure ! An unknown benefactor ! Edwin chuckled and wormed his way surreptitiously along the seat. Stealthily he fingered his half-crown and hugged it in the palm of his left hand. His heart beat with the excitement of his exploit. He looked out of the window opposite and fumbled his hand towards the opening in the bag. He touched it. Suddenly a sharp voice rang out :

"That man's picking your pocket!"

An excited individual opposite was pointing at him. The woman uttered an exclamation and snatched at her bag. The baby cried. The conductor rang the bell. Everyone seemed to be closing in on Edwin. Instinctively he snatched his hand away and thrust it in his pocket (the most foolish thing he could have done). Everyone was talking. A calm muscular-looking gentleman who had not spoken seized Edwin by the wrist and said calmly:

"Look in your bag, Madam, and see whether he has taken anything."

The bus came to a halt. Edwin muttered:

"I assure you—nothing of the sort——"

How could he possibly explain that he was doing just the opposite? Would a single person believe a word of his yarn about the half-crown? The woman whimpered:

"No, 'e ain't taken nothin', bad luck to 'im. There was only four pennies and a 'alfpenny anyway. Dirty thief!"

"Are you goin' to give 'im in charge?" asked the conductor.

"Yer can't if 'e ain't actually taken nothin', can yer? The dirty thievin' swine tryin' to rob a 'ard-workin' 'onest woman!"

"I wasn't! I wasn't!" feebly spluttered Edwin, blushing a ripe beetroot colour.

"Shame! Shame! Chuck 'im off the bus! Dirty sneak! Call a copper!" were some of the remarks being hurled about.

The conductor was losing time and patience. He beckoned vigorously to Edwin and said:

"Come on, off you go!"

There was no appeal. He got up and slunk out. Popular opinion was too strong against him. As he stepped off the back board, the conductor gave him a parting kick which sent him flying on to the pavement. It was an operation received with shrieks of laughter and a round of applause from the occupants of the vehicle, taken up by a small band of other people who had been attracted by the disturbance. He darted down a back street to the accompaniment of boos and jeers.

It says something for Edwin Potheary that this

unfortunate rebuff to his first attempt to do a good action did not send him helter-skelter back to the fried fish shop in the Waterloo Road. He felt crumpled, bruised, mortified, disappointed, discouraged; but is not the path of all martyrs and reformers strewn with similar debris? Are not all really disinterested actions liable to misconstruction? He went into a dairy and partook of a glass of milk and a bun. Then he started out again. He would see more rural, less sophisticated, people. In the country there must be simple, kindly people, needing his help. He walked for several hours with but a vague sense of direction. At last he came to a public park. A group of dirty boys were seated on the grass. They were apparently having a banquet. They did not seem to require him. He passed on, and came to an enclosure. Suddenly between some rhododendron bushes he looked into a small dell. On a seat by himself was an elderly man in a shabby suit. He looked the picture of misery and distress. His hands were resting on his knees, and his eyes were fixed in a melancholy scrutiny on the ground. It was obvious that some great trouble possessed him. He was as still as a shadow. It was the figure of a man lost in the past or—contemplating suicide? Edwin's breath came quickly. He made his way to him. In order to do this it was necessary to climb a railing. There was probably another way round, but was there time? At any minute there might be a sudden movement, the crack of a revolver. Edwin tore his trousers and scratched his forearm, but he managed to enter the dell unobserved. He approached the seat. The man never looked up. Then Edwin said with sympathetic tears in his voice:

“My poor fellow, may I be of any assistance——?”

There was a disconcerting jar. The melancholy individual started and turned on him angrily:

“Blast you! I'd nearly got it! What the devil are you doing here?”

And without waiting for an answer he darted away among the trees. At the same time a voice called over the park railings:

“Ho! you, there, what are you doing over there? You come back the way you came. I saw yer.”

The burly figure of a park-keeper with gaiters and stout stick beckoned him. Edwin got up and clambered back again, scratching his arm.

"Now then," said the keeper. "Name, address, age and occupation, if *you* please."

"I was only—" began Edwin. But what *was* he only doing? Could he explain to a park-keeper that he was only about to do a kind action to a poor man? He spluttered and gave his name, address, age and occupation.

"Oh," exclaimed the keeper. "Fried fish, eh? And what were you trying to do? Get orders? Or were you begging from his lordship?"

"His lordship!"

"That man you was speaking to was Lord Budleigh-Salterton, the great scientist. He's thinking out 'is great invention, otherwise I'd go and ask 'im if 'e wanted to prosecute yer for being on 'is park on felonious intent or what."

"I assure you—" stammered Mr. Potheary.

The park-keeper saw him well off the premises, and gave him much gratuitous advice about his future behaviour, darkened with melancholy prophecies regarding the would-be felon's strength of character to live up to it.

Leaving the park he struck out towards the more rural neighbourhood. He calculated that he must be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hendon. At the end of a lane he met a sallow-faced young man walking rapidly. His eyes were bloodshot and restless. He glanced at Edwin and stopped.

"Excuse me, sir," he said.

Edwin drew himself to attention. The young man looked up and down nervously. He was obviously in a great state of distress.

"What can I do for you?"

"I—I—h-hardly like to ask you, sir, I——"

He stammered shockingly. Edwin turned on his most sympathetic manner.

"You are suffering. What is it?"

"Sh-sh-shell-shock, shir."

"Ah!"

At last! Some heroic reflex of the war darted through Edwin's mind. Here was his real chance at last. A poor fellow broken by the war and in need, neglected by an ungrateful country. Almost hidden by his outer coat he observed one of those little strips of coloured ribbon, which implied more than one campaign.

"Where did you—meet your trouble?" he asked.

"P-P-P-Palestine, sir, capturing a T-T-Turkish redoubt. I was through G-G-Gallipoli too, sir, but I won't d-d-distress you. I am in a—in a—hospital at St. Albans, came to see my g-g-g-girl, but she's g-g-g-gone—v-v-vanished. . . ."

"You don't say so!"

"T-t-trouble is I l-l-lost my p-pass back. N-not quite enough m-mon——"

"Dear me! How much short are you?"

"S-s-s-six shill—s-s-s-six——"

"Six shillings? Well, I'm very sorry. Look here, my good fellow, here's seven-and-sixpence and God bless you!"

"T-t-thank you very much, sir. W-will you give me your n-name and——"

"No, no, no, that's quite all right. I'm very pleased to be of assistance. Please forget all about it."

He pressed the soldier's hand and hurried on. It was done! He had performed a kind, unselfish action and no one should ever hear of it. Mr. Pothecary's eyes glowed with satisfaction. Poor fellow! Even if the story were slightly exaggerated, what did it matter? He was obviously a discharged soldier, ill, and in need. The seven-and-sixpence would make an enormous difference. He would always cherish the memory of his kind, unknown benefactor. It was a glorious sensation! Why had he never thought before of doing a kindly act? It was inspiring, illuminating, almost intoxicating! He recalled with zest the delirious feeling which ran through him when he had said, "No, no, no!" He would *not* give his name. He was the good Samaritan, a ship passing in the night. And now he would be able to go home, or go back to his business. He swung down the lane, singing to himself. As he turned the corner he came to a low bungalow-building. It was in a rather deserted spot. It had a board outside which announced "Tea, cocoa, light refreshments. Cyclists catered for."

It was past midday, and although tea and cocoa had never made any great appeal to the gastronomic fancies of Edwin Pothecary, he felt in his present spiritually elevating mood that here was a suitable spot for a well-merited rest and lunch.

He entered a deserted room, filled with light oak chairs, and tables with green-tiled tops on which were placed pink

vases containing dried ferns. A few bluebottles darted away from the tortuous remains of what had once apparently been a ham, lurking behind tall bottles of sweets on the counter. The room smelt of soda and pickles. Edwin rapped on the table for some time, but no one came. At last a woman entered from the front door leading to the garden. She was fat and out of breath.

Edwin coughed and said :

"Good mornin', madam. May I have a bite of somethin'?"

The woman looked at him and continued panting. When her pulmonary contortions had somewhat subsided she said :

"I s'pose you 'aven't seen a pale young man up the lane?"

It was difficult to know what made him do it, but Edwin lied. He said :

"No."

"Oh!" she replied. "I don't know where 'e's got to. 'E's not s'posed to go out of the garden. 'E's been ill, you know."

"Really!"

"'E's my nefyer, but I can't always keep an eye on 'im. 'E's a bright one, 'e is. I shall 'ave 'im sent back to the 'ome."

"Ah, poor fellow! I suppose he was—injured in the war?"

"War!" The plump lady snorted. She became almost aggressive and confidential. She came close up to Edwin and shook her finger backwards and forwards in front of his eyes.

"I'll tell yer 'ow much war 'e done. When they talked about conscription, 'e got that frightened, 'e went out every day and tried to drink himself from a A1 man into a C3 man, and by God! 'e succeeded."

"You don't say so!"

"I do say so. And more. When 'is turn came 'e was in the 'orspital with Delirious Trimmings."

"My God!"

"'E's only just come out. He's all right as long as 'e don't get 'old of a little money."

"What do you mean?"

"If 'e can get 'old of the price of a few whiskies, 'e'll 'ave another attack come on! What are yer goin' ter 'ave—tea or cocoa?"

"I must go! I must go!" exclaimed the only customer Mrs. Boggins had had for two days, and gripping his umbrella he dashed out of the shop.

"Good Lord! there's another one got 'em!" ejaculated the good landlady. "I wonder whether 'e pinched anything while I was out? 'Ere! Come back, you dirty little bow-legged swipe!"

But Mr. Potheary was racing down the lane, muttering to himself:

"Yes, that was a good action! A very good action indeed!"

A mile further on he came to a straggling village, a forlorn and unkempt spot, only relieved by a gaudy inn called The Two Tumblers. Edwin staggered into the private bar and drank two pints of Government ale and a double gin as the liquid accompaniment to a hunk of bread and cheese.

It was not until he had lighted his pipe after the negotiation of these delicacies that he could again focus his philosophical outlook. Then he thought to himself: "It's a rum thing 'ow difficult it is to do a good action. You'd think it'd be dead easy, but everythin' seems against yer. One must be able to do it *somewhere*. P'raps one ought to go abroad, among foreigners and black men. That's it! That's why all these 'ere Bible Society people go out among black people, Chinese and so on. They find there's nothin' doin' over 'ere."

Had it not been for the beer and gin it is highly probable that Edwin would have given up the project, and have returned to fish and chips. But lying back in a comfortable seat in The Two Tumblers his thoughts mellowed. He felt broad-minded, comfortable, tolerant . . . one had to make allowances. There must be all sorts of ways. Money wasn't the only thing. Besides, he was spending too much. He couldn't afford to go on throwing away seven-and-sixpences. One must be able to help people by—helping them. Doing things for them which didn't cost money. He thought of Sir Walter Raleigh throwing down his cloak for Queen Elizabeth to walk over. Romantic, but—extravagant and silly, really a shrewd political move, no doubt; not a good action at all. If he met an ill-clad tramp he could take off

his coat and wrap round his shoulders and then—? Walk home to Quince Villa in his braces? What would Mrs. Potheary have to say? Phew! One could save people from drowning, but he didn't know how to swim. Fire! Perhaps there would be a fire. He could swarm up a ladder and save a woman from the top bedroom window. Heroic, but hardly inconspicuous; not exactly what he had meant. Besides, the firemen would never let him; they always kept these showy stunts for themselves. There *must* be something . . .

He walked out of The Two Tumblers.

Crossing the road, he took a turning off the High Street. He saw a heavily-built woman carrying a basket of washing. He hurried after her, and raising his hat, said:

"Excuse me, madam, may I carry your basket for you?"

She turned on him suspiciously and glared:

"No, thanks, Mr. Bottle-nose. I've 'ad some of that before. You 'op it! Mrs. Jaggs 'ad 'ers pinched last week that way."

"Of course," he thought to himself as he hurried away. "The trouble is I'm not dressed for the part. A bloomin' swell can go about doin' good actions all day and not arouse suspicions. If I try and 'elp a girl off a tramcar I get my face slapped."

Mr. Potheary was learning. He was becoming a complete philosopher, but it was not till late in the afternoon that he suddenly realized that patience and industry is always rewarded. He was appealed to by a maiden in distress.

It came about in this way. He found the atmosphere of Northern London entirely unsympathetic to good deeds. All his actions appeared suspect. He began to feel at last like a criminal. He was convinced that he was being watched and followed. Once he patted a little girl's head in a paternal manner. Immediately a woman appeared at a doorway and bawled out:

"'Ere, Lizzie, you come inside!"

At length in disgust he boarded a south-bound bus. He decided to experiment nearer home. He went to the terminus and took a train to the station just before his own. It was a small town called Uplingham. This should be the last dance of the moral philanderer. If there was no one in Uplingham upon whom he could perform a good action, he would just

walk home—barely two miles—and go to bed and forget all about it. To-morrow he would return to Fish-and-chips, and the normal behaviour of the normal citizen.

Uplingham was a dismal little town, consisting mostly of churches, chapels and pubs, and apparently quite deserted. As Edwin wandered through it there crept over him a sneaking feeling of relief. If he met no one—well, there it was, he had done his best; he could go home with a clear conscience. After all, it was the spirit which counted in these things. . . .

“O-o-oh!”

He was passing a small stone church, standing back on a little-frequented lane. The maiden was seated alone in the porch and she was crying. Edwin hustled through the gate, and as he approached her he had time to observe that she was young, quietly dressed, and distinctly pretty.

“You are in trouble,” he said in his most feeling manner.

She looked up at him quickly, and dabbed her eyes.

“I’ve lost my baby! I’ve lost my baby!” she cried.

“Dear, dear, that’s very unfortunate! How did it happen?”

She pointed at an empty perambulator in the porch.

“I waited an hour here for my friends, and husband, and the clergyman. My baby was to be christened.” She gasped incoherently. “No one turned up. I went across to the Vicarage. The Vicar was away. I believe I ought to have gone to St. Bride’s. This is St. Paul’s. They didn’t know anything about it. They say people often make that mistake. When I got back the baby was gone. O-o-o-oh!”

“There, there, don’t cry,” said Mr. Potheary. “Now I’ll go over to St. Bride’s and find out about it.”

“Oh, sir, do you mind waiting here with the perambulator while I go? I want my baby. I want my baby.”

“Why, yes, of course, of course.”

She dashed up the lane and left Mr. Potheary in charge of the empty perambulator. In fifteen minutes’ time a thick-set young man came hurrying up to the porch. He looked at Edwin, and pointing to the perambulator, said:

“Is this Mrs. Frank’s? or Mrs. Fred’s?”

“I don’t know,” said Edwin rather testily.

“You don’t know! But you’re Old Binns, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not.”

The young man looked at him searchingly and then

disappeared. Ten minutes elapsed and then a small boy rode up on a bicycle. He was also out of breath.

"Has Mrs. George been 'ere?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Edwin.

"Mr. Henderson says he's awfully sorry but he won't be able to get away. You are to kiss the baby for 'im."

"I don't know anything about it."

"This is St. Bride's, isn't it?"

"No, this is St. Paul's."

"Oh!" The boy leapt on to the bicycle and also vanished.

"This is absurd," thought Edwin. "Of course, the whole thing is as plain as daylight. The poor girl has come to the wrong church. The whole party is at St. Bride's, somebody must have taken the baby on there. I might as well take the perambulator along. They'll be pleased. Now I wonder which is the way."

He wheeled the perambulator into the lane. There was no one to ask. He progressed nearly two hundred yards till he came to a field with a pond in it. This was apparently the wrong direction. He was staring about when he suddenly became aware of a hue and cry. A party of people came racing down the lane headed by the thick-set man, who was exclaiming:

"There he is! There he is!"

Edwin felt his heart beating. This was going to be a little embarrassing. They closed on him. The thick-set man seized his wrists and at the same time remarked:

"See he hasn't any firearms on him, Frank."

The large man alluded to as Frank gripped him from behind.

"What have you done with my baby?" he demanded fiercely.

"I 'aven't seen no baby," yelled Mr. Potheary.

"Oh! 'aven't yer! What are yer doin' with my perambulator then?"

"I'm takin' it to St. Bride's Church."

"Goin' in the opposite direction."

"I didn't know the way."

"Where's the baby?"

"I 'aven't seen it, I tell yer. The mother said she'd lost it."

"What the hell! Do you know the mother's in bed sick?"

You're a liar, my man, and we're goin' to take you in charge. If you've done anythin' to my baby I'll kill you with my hands."

"That's it, Frank. Let 'im 'ave it. Throw 'im in the pond!"

"I tell yer I don't know anythin' about it at all, with yer Franks and Freds and Georges! Go to the devil, all of yer!"

In spite of his protestations, someone produced a rope and they handcuffed him and tied him to the gate of the field. A small crowd had collected and began to boo and jeer. A man from a cottage hard by produced a drag, and between them they dragged the pond, as the general belief was that Edwin had tied a stone to the baby and thrown it in and was then just about to make off.

The uproar continued for some time, mud and stones being thrown about rather carelessly.

The crowd became impatient that no baby was found in the pond. At length another man turned up on a bicycle and called out:

"What are you doing, Frank? You've missed the christening!"

"What!"

"Old Binns turned up with the nipper all right. He'd come round the wrong way."

The crowd was obviously disappointed at the release of Edwin, and father's only solatium was:

"Well, it's lucky for you, old bird!"

He and his friends trundled the perambulator away rapidly across the fields. Edwin had hardly time to give a sigh of relief before he found himself the centre of a fresh disturbance. He was approaching the church when another crowd assailed him, headed by the forlorn maiden. She was still in a state of distress, but she was hugging a baby to her.

"Ah! You've found the baby!" exclaimed Edwin, trying to be amiable.

"Where is the perambulator?" she demanded.

"Your 'usband 'as taken it away, madame. He seemed to think I——"

A tall frigid young man stepped forward and said:

"Excuse me, I am this lady's husband. Will you please explain yourself?"

Then Edwin lost his temper.

"Well, damn it, I don't know who you all are!"

"The case is quite clear. You volunteered to take charge of the perambulator while my wife was absent. On her return you announce that it is spirited away. I shall hold you responsible for the entire cost—nearly ten pounds."

"Make it a thousand," roared Edwin. "I'm 'aving a nice cheap day."

"I don't wish for any of your insolence, either. My wife has had a very trying experience. The baby has been christened Fred."

"Well, what's the matter with that?"

"Nothing," screamed the mother. "*Only that it is a girl!* It's a girl and it's been duly christened Fred in a Christian church. Oh! there's been an awful muddle."

"It's not this old fool's fault," interpolated the elderly woman quietly. "You see, Mrs. Frank and Mrs. Fred Smith were both going to have their babies christened to-day. Only Mrs. Frank was took sick, and sent me along with the child. I went to the wrong church and thinkin' there was some mistake, went back home. Mrs. Frank's baby's never been christened at all. In the meantime, the ceremony was ready to start at St. Paul's and Frank 'isself was there. No baby. They sends Old Binns to scout around at other churches. People do make mistakes—finds this good lady's child all primed up for christening in the church door, and no one near, carries it off. In the meantime, the father had gone on the ramp. It's him that probably went off with the perambulator and trounced you up a bit, old sport. It'll learn you not to interfere so much in future perhaps."

"And the baby's christened Fred!" wailed the mother. "My baby! My Gwendolin!" And she looked at Edwin with bitter recrimination in her eyes.

There was still a small crowd following and boys were jeering, and a fox-terrier, getting very excited, jumped up and bit Mr. Potheary through the seat of his trousers. He struck at it with his stick, and hit a small boy, whose mother happened to be present. The good lady immediately entered the lists.

"Baby-killer. . . . Hun!" were the last words he heard as he was chased up the street and across the fields in the direction of his own village.

When he arrived it was nearly dark. Mr. Potheary was

tired, dirty, battered, torn, outraged, bruised, and hatless. And his spirit hardened. The forces of reaction surged through him. He was done with good actions. He felt vindictive, spiteful, wicked. Slowly he took the last turning and his eye once more alighted on—the Peel's fowl-house.

And there came to him a vague desire to end his day by performing some action the contrary to good, something spiteful, petty, malign. His soul demanded some recompense for its abortive energies. And then he remembered that the Peels were away. They were returning late that evening. The two intensive fowl-houses were at the end of the kitchen garden, where all the young spring cabbages and peas had just been planted. They could be approached between a slit in the narrow black fence adjacent to a turnip-field. Rather a long way round. A simple and rather futile plan sprang to his mind, but he was too tired to think of anything more criminal or diabolic.

He would creep round to the back, get through the fence, force his way into the fowl-house. Then he would kick out all those expensive Rhode Island pampered hens and lock them out. Inside he would upset everything and smash the place to pieces. The fowls would get all over the place. They would eat the young vegetables. Some of them would get lost, stolen by gipsies, killed by rats. What did he care? The Peels would probably not discover the outrage till the morrow, and they would never know who did it. Edwin chuckled inwardly, and rolled his eyes like the smooth villain of a fit-up melodrama. He glanced up and down to see that no one was looking, then he got across a gate and entered the turnip-field.

In five minutes' time he was forcing the door of the fowl-house with a spade. The fowls were already settling down for the night, and they clucked rather alarmingly, but Edwin's blood was up. He chased them all out, forty-five of them, and made savage lunges at them with his feet. Then he upset all the corn he could find, and poured water on it and jumped on it. He smashed the complicated invention suspended from the ceiling, whereby the fowls had to reach up and get one grain of corn at a time. To his joy he found a pot of green paint, which he flung promiscuously all over the walls and floor (and incidentally his clothes).

Then he crept out and bolted both of the doors.

The sleepy creatures were standing about outside, some feebly pecking about on the ground. He chased them through into the vegetable garden ; then he rubbed some of the dirt and paint from his clothes and returned to the road.

When he arrived home he said to his wife :

"I fell off a tram on Waterloo Bridge. Lost my hat."

He was cold and wet and his teeth were chattering. His wife hustled him off to bed and gave him a little hot grog.

Between the sheets he recovered contentment. He gurgled exultantly at this last and only satisfying exploit of the day. He dreamed lazily of the blind rage of the Peels. . . .

It must have been half-past ten when his wife came up again to bring him some hot gruel. He had been asleep. She put the cup by the bedside and rearranged his pillow.

"Feeling better ?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm all right," he murmured.

She sat on a chair by the side of the bed and after a few minutes remarked :

"You've missed an excitement while you've been asleep."

"Oh ?"

"Yes. A fire !"

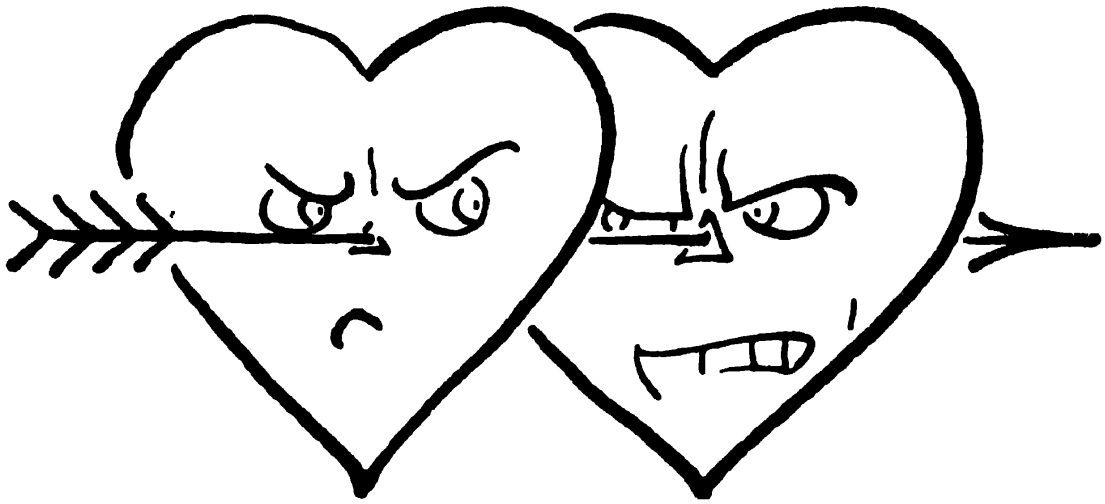
"A fire ?"

"The Peels came home about an hour and a half ago and found the place on fire at the back."

"Oh ?"

"Their cook Lizzie has been over. She said some straw near the wash-house must have started it. It's burnt out the wash-house and both the fowl-houses. She says Mr. Peel says he don't care very much because he was heavily insured for the lot. But the funny thing is, the fowls wasn't insured and they've found the whole lot down the field on the rabbit-hutches. Somebody must have got in and let the whole lot out. It was a fine thing to do, or else the poor things would all have been burnt up. What's the matter, Ned ? Is the gruel too hot ?"

A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCE



W. A. DARLINGTON

W. A. DARLINGTON was schoolmaster, soldier and civil servant before he began journalism and authorship. He is well known as a dramatic critic and authority on the drama, and he has written a number of humorous books, including *Alf's Button*.

A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"**H**ow I hate lovers!" said Mary Nicholls suddenly, in a venomous tone.

Her husband, outstretched contentedly on the lawn beside her deck-chair, opened his eyes.

"Didn't know you had any," he said.

"Well, of course, *if* I had any, you *wouldn't* know. But I didn't mean that, idiot. What I meant was, how I hate having engaged couples staying in the house."

"Meaning George and Caroline?"

"Meaning, especially, George and Caroline."

"Oh, I don't know." Bob Nicholls rolled over on to his stomach—which, he felt suddenly, would look less conspicuous that way—and considered the point. "It means they're practically potty for the time being, I admit. But they work their pottiness off on one another, and don't hurt anybody else."

"That's all you know! D'you realize that I'm never sure from one meal-time to the next whether they're going to be on speaking terms or not? If they're not, they won't sit next to each other. If they are, they want to sit in each other's laps."

"Not an easy position," remarked Bob flippantly.

"Not half so difficult as mine, to have to cope with it. If they've quarrelled they glower at their plates and don't speak, and if they've made it up they hold hands under the table and don't speak either."

"Well, a little silence never hurt anybody. We all talk too much."

"I dare say. But there's silence *and* silence."

Bob picked a blade of grass and chewed it ruminatively gazing out across the valley and thinking vaguely that the River Wandle looked very pretty when the sun caught it.

"What's the matter with George and Caro?" he asked

at last. "We weren't so up-and-down when we were engaged, were we? I remember you made me feel I'd like to murder you once or twice, but I never let it appear in my manner."

"They've been engaged too long, that's what it is. And I've quite decided not to have them here again together until they're married—or until they've come unstuck for good."

"Jolly little week-enders they'd be then!"

"Jollier than at present, anyhow. Is that George coming this way?"

"It is. And looking like a hearse-horse."

"Oh dear! I did hope they'd have made it up by now. . . . Hullo, George."

George Cardwell was one of those people who get christened "George" almost automatically. He was big, solid and, at ordinary times, reliable. He was excellent at games, and pretty good at his work. He was twenty-six years of age.

"Hullo," he returned grumpily.

"'Prithee, why so pale, fond lover?'" inquired Bob, who was a well-read man in a quiet way and never let mere tact stand in the way of an apposite quotation.

"Oh, shut up!" growled George.

"You and Caro haven't been quarrelling *again*, have you?" Mary demanded in a stern voice. Really, she felt, this was beyond bearing. George and/or Caroline must be spoken to sharply. Preferably George.

"Yes, we have."

"Well, really, George . . ."

"Don't bother to go on, Mary. I know what you're going to say. I know Caro and I have spoilt your party for you. Well, it won't happen again. It's over. She's chucked me."

He slumped down on the grass and looked so miserable that Mary, in spite of her irritation, began to administer comfort.

"I shouldn't worry. She's done that several times before."

"Yes, but she's never done this before!"

He brought a hand out of a pocket and displayed something which glittered in the sun.

"She's given you back the ring?" said Bob in a surprised tone. "How very Victorian!"

George gave a wry smile.

"Not so very Victorian, as a matter of fact," he said grimly. "She plugged it at my head."

"Did she hit you?" Bob asked with interest.

"I caught it," said George simply. "Force of habit," he added, as if it had occurred to him that some explanation of so undignified a proceeding was necessary. "Rather a good catch, as a matter of fact."

Mary, still the ministering angel, brought the conversation back to the point.

"Never mind, George. She'll come round."

"She won't. It's a real bust-up this time. And upon my word, it's almost a relief."

He did not look relieved, however; and Mary, forgetting how ready she had been a few minutes ago to discuss the possibility of the engagement coming unstuck, broke into protest.

"But, George—it's madness. Look how you love each other!"

"Do we?" George's voice was bitter.

"Of course you do."

"I couldn't face a lifetime of this sort of thing."

"It wouldn't happen once you were married."

"How can you know that?"

"Because neither of you is like that, really. What was it about, this time?"

"Oh, something I said to her about young Harrison."

"Geoffrey? Why, he's only a boy. You don't mean to say you were jealous of *him*?"

"No, of course not. It was just—oh, just that I couldn't stand seeing Caro buttering him up when she hadn't a civil word to say to me. She was doing it to annoy me, of course. I dare say I've been a fool."

"You certainly have—both of you!" said Mary's husband in heartfelt tones.

"Be quiet, Bob. . . . George, you've simply got to get married."

"Who to?"

"Don't be silly. Caro, of course."

"You should have seen the look in her eyes when she threw that ring. No, that's over. Anyhow, I don't want a wife who throws things."

"She *isn't* that sort. You know it as well as I do."

"Well, she never was before. . . ."

"And she isn't now. It's this ridiculous long engagement that's getting on both your nerves. Why don't you get married at once?"

"Not enough money."

Bob sat up straight.

"Why, good Lord, you've got heaps for a start. A steady job . . ."

"Five hundred a year," put in George.

"And Caro's people will be good for . . ."

"Another hundred at the most."

"Well, that's six hundred."

"And how far will that go?"

"All the way, if you're careful," said Mary.

George looked obstinate.

"Caro and I decided at the start," he said, "that we wouldn't get married till we could afford it comfortably. So many people"—his voice took on the slight sing-song of one repeating a formula he knows by heart—"make a mess of things by having to start by saving and skimping. We made up our minds to be sensible."

"Sensible! My aunt!" commented Bob. He got up and marched away.

Mary gazed pensively at his retreating back.

"It doesn't seem to work, does it, George dear? Why not give up the idea of waiting? You can manage all right now in a quiet way, and you'll very soon have more. I shouldn't go on being sensible if I were you—it's so silly."

"But . . ."

She faced him squarely.

"Tell me, George, honestly—would *you* mind making do on what you've got, till you get a rise?"

"No, of course not. But would it be fair to Caroline?"

"Who wants you to be fair to Caroline?"

George laughed ruefully.

"Caroline, I expect."

"Not she. You go and knock her on the head with a spanner, and tell her she's got to marry you and make the best of it. You'll be surprised how meek she'll be, once she sees you mean business."

George stared.

"But Caro isn't like that," he said.

"All women are like that to some extent," Mary replied with energy. "Anyhow, try it. You can't make things worse than they are at present."

"That's true." George jumped to his feet. "You're right, Mary. I'll see if I can find her now."

He was off, before Mary could utter a word to restrain him, or point out that it would be wiser to let some interval elapse before putting her well-meant advice into execution. She lay back in her deck-chair and sighed. Bob was quite right. People in love were, practically speaking, potty. No good bothering about them. She picked up a book from beside her chair and began to read.

Her peace was not long unbroken, however. A voice behind her said "Mary" in a tense stage whisper, and Caroline Coxhead poked her head out of some bushes like a supernatural character in a pastoral play—a wood-nymph, or something.

She might have made a very satisfactory wood-nymph, Mary thought, for she was fair, slight and extremely graceful. Ordinarily, too, she was a very pretty girl; but at the moment her features were distorted by love out of their normally pleasant expression into something more fitted to a satyr than a dryad.

"Hallo, Caro," said Mary, resignedly shutting her book. "Did he find you?"

"George? No." Miss Coxhead emerged from concealment. "I've managed to dodge him. Look here, Mary—I'm going. I know it's no way to behave, and I'm sorry if it spoils your party; but I can't stick it any longer. Anyhow, I'm not fit to associate with."

"But—but when?"

"Now. Your maid's packed my things. And I've just seen Bob, and he's promised to drive me to Halston to catch the 3.25."

"But what about poor George?"

"Nothing. I'm not going to see him again. Heavens—he's coming! Good-bye, Mary. Forgive me sometime."

"Caro" Mary began. But Caroline had melted into the bushes again. A real dryad could not have done it more neatly.

George came up at a distracted gallop.

"I say, Mary—was that Caro with you?"

"Yes," said Mary wearily. Really, she reflected, from the way people shot in and out, she might be a character in a French farce, instead of a lady enjoying the after-lunch peace of her own garden.

"Where's she gone?"

"I don't know. But I know where she's going."

"Where?"

"Home."

"When?"

"Bob's taking her to catch the 3.25."

"Then I must get hold of her at once."

"She won't see you."

"I'll hide in the car, or something."

"That'll be no good. It's simply silly to have a scene with her now. You must give her time to simmer down, and then get her by herself."

"How can I if she's off practically at once? And when she's gone, I shan't be able to catch her. She'll hide from me, or get engaged to somebody else. I must do it now."

"You can't," said Mary calmly. "There goes the car."

It was true. Bob's big Sunbeam was clearly audible in the drive. George bounded up a bank to a spot which commanded a distant view of the lodge gates, and was just in time to see the car's long yellow body turning into the main road.

He turned on Mary furiously.

"Now look what you've done, keeping me here talking," he shouted. "Is this a conspiracy, or what?"

"Of course it's not a conspiracy. I'm on your side, George. Don't be so violent."

"Dash it, you were telling me to *be* violent not half an hour ago."

"Yes, but at the proper time, and with the right person. Now listen, George. I'll tell you what to do."

"Do? It's too late to do anything!"

"Nonsense! Look at your watch."

George obeyed, and his eyebrows went up.

"Why, it's barely a quarter to three! They'll be miles too early for the train."

"Exactly. Caro wanted to get out of your way."

"Well, what do I do? Follow, and have it out in Halston station? Rather public."

"No, idiot. Get your car and catch the train at the station *before* Halston. That's Statham. It's only seven miles away, and a good road. You'll do it easily."

"And then?"

"At Halston, you'll see Bob putting Caro into the train. He'll see that she gets a carriage to herself. It's not hard on that line. At the next stop—Dogferry—you join her just as the train's starting. And that'll give you fifteen miles of the slowest local service in England before you get to Templeton Junction. Half an hour to knock her on the head in—and good luck to you!"

But her last words were wasted. George was half-way to the garage by the time they were uttered.

Fred Cropper, guard on the London and Home Counties Railway, blew his whistle, swung himself into his van as it lumbered past him, settled down in the little seat provided for him by his employers, and began to muse morosely on life. Being a guard on the little branch line which ran up the Wandle Valley from Templeton Junction to Barnstead was not an arduous occupation, and he found plenty of time for introspection.

Life, as Fred Cropper saw it, was a safe but dull affair. In the days when he first joined the L. and H.C. Railway Company as a very young porter, he had had a vast, vague ambition. He saw himself becoming, some day, general superintendent, or something of that kind.

Nothing of the sort had happened, however. He had gone from safe, dull jobs to safe, dull jobs. The big occasion, the chance to prove himself had never come his way.

Even in the War, owing to the flatness of his feet, Safety and Dullness had continued to mark Mr. Cropper for their own. In fact, nothing had ever happened to him, and it seemed unlikely, how, that anything ever would.

The Wandle Valley Branch was no sphere of action for an adventurous spirit. It was a friendly little line, on which most of the passengers generally knew one another by sight, and nearly all were known by name to Mr. Cropper. Even

when strangers did appear, he could generally give a pretty accurate guess at their reason for visiting the Valley.

Such a life, thought Mr. Cropper with an unwonted flash of imagery, was as sluggish as the Wandle itself, that torpid stream along which he was carried week in, week out, three times a day (except Sundays) on and on for ever.

The worst part of the whole thing, he mused grimly, was that his work was not even necessary.

Tom Taylor, the driver of the engine, a man of action rather than words, would be perfectly capable of working the Wandle Valley train by himself. All his, Cropper's, waving of his flag and blowing of his whistle was nothing more than a ridiculous formality. So was the word "Guard" on his uniform. Whom, or what, was he ever called upon to guard, and from what danger?

The train here pulled up at Statham. The platform was almost deserted, as usual. Mr. Cropper watched a tousled and flustered young man get in at the back of the train. Then he waved his symbolical flag and blew his redundant whistle, and Tom Taylor moved on towards Halston.

Mr. Cropper went back to his little seat, and let his thoughts play round the tousled young man. A stranger he was, and looked like a gentleman—though you couldn't always tell, nowadays. Probably staying with the Penfolds at Statham Manor; but why he should be hatless, tousled and flustered was not apparent.

Halston. Ah, here was Mr. Nicholls of Burdsley Grange, seeing off a girl. A very pretty girl, too, whom Mr. Cropper did not remember to have seen on the Wandle Valley Branch before. Perhaps the Nichollses had sent over to Templeton Junction to fetch her when she arrived. However that might be, Mr. Cropper felt pleased that she had not gone back the same way. He was highly susceptible, in a quiet and respectful way, and a passionate devotee of the films. This girl, thought Mr. Cropper, was as beautiful as any film-star.

It seemed to Mr. Cropper that the tousled young man was also highly susceptible. Leaning half out of his carriage window and holding one hand before his face, he was watching the girl in a way which the guard could not help thinking was distinctly furtive.

The whistle blew, the flag waved, and the train proceeded. Dogferry was the next station—a lonely building, little better

than a mere "halt," which seldom consigned many passengers to Mr. Cropper's charge.

There were none to-day. The platform was deserted. For form's sake, the guard alighted. But just as he was about to signal the train on again, the tousled young man left his carriage, and slunk swiftly towards the front of the train. Just before he got to the first-class compartment where the pretty girl was, he paused, and waited.

Mr. Cropper saw his game. He was going to wait until the train started, and then he was going to get in beside the girl, scrape acquaintance with her, annoy her—perhaps worse!

The question was, what could be done about it? As guard, Mr. Cropper felt himself to have duties as chaperone towards this very pretty girl. Yet what could he do? If the young man would only make his intentions clear by getting into the carriage now, it would be easy. Mr. Cropper could then walk along the train and stare in at the carriage window in a repressive way, to let the young man see that Law and Order had an official eye upon him. He might even demand to see the young man's ticket, and order him back into the third class from which he had come.

But so long as the young man stayed on the platform Mr. Cropper was helpless. Once the train started, and the young man was in the girl's carriage, she would be at his mercy for the long run across Templeton Marshes. Mr. Cropper remembered a lurid crime-story he had once read, in which a homicidal lunatic dismembered a woman in a railway carriage in circumstances roughly similar to these. If this nice girl arrived at Templeton Junction in small pieces, would not he, Cropper, be morally responsible? What, oh what, was he to do?

The problem was solved by Tom Taylor who, having spent the past half-minute wondering exasperatedly what the 'ell ole Fred thought 'e was playin' at, took the law into his own hands and started the train. Mr. Cropper gave a convulsive jerk with his flag, nearly swallowed his whistle, and leapt into his van, forgetting entirely in his perturbation to notice which carriage the young man entered. Ah well, he felt, perhaps it was as well. The responsibility was out of his hands now, anyway. And no doubt the girl was quite capable of looking after herself. These modern girls were

equal to anything. Well, perhaps not homicidal lunatics and dismemberment ; but almost anything else.

Meanwhile, in ignorance of the perturbation of soul and conscience she was causing to a responsible official, Caro sat hunched up in a corner of her carriage. She was thankful to be alone, and to be able to soak herself in misery away from the tactful sympathy of her late host.

Bob Nicholls had tried her patience very severely. In the car on the way to the station he had engaged her in earnestly cheerful conversation on a variety of impersonal topics, until Caro could cheerfully have brained him. But her only weapon was an umbrella, and there was no room to swing it properly in the Sunbeam.

On the platform, waiting for the train, things had grown worse and worse. Bob had found his stock of impersonal topics rapidly running low, and was obviously asking himself why this infernal girl had insisted on getting here so much too early. Caro, her fingers itching on her umbrella, had tried hard to persuade him to leave her. He would plainly have been thankful to do so, but that his code of hospitality forbade. So he had stayed, and had kept up an increasingly laborious trickle of polite conversation, until Caro had had great trouble to restrain herself from loud yells.

She was in no mood for sympathy. Certain though she was that she had done the right thing in tearing George violently and finally from his place in her life, she was finding the operation exquisitely painful. But now that she was able to suffer in peace, she did feel, in a way, better.

She felt as a man might feel after having had a tooth out. He might value the tooth while it was in his head ; but once it had been condemned by the dentist, he must make up his mind not only to its loss, but to the pain that its loss would cause. The pain would be sharp, but temporary ; the ultimate benefit would be permanent.

Thinking of the future relief was a great help, she found. The knowledge that the intolerable ache must pass made it seem instantly less intolerable. Just so might the dentist's victim tell himself, in the midst of his sorrows, how wise he had been not to keep the tooth in his head, and how thankful he would soon be for his wisdom.

For the moment, however, Caro could not deny that she felt very unhappy indeed. She gazed resentfully out of the

window. The tender green of the Wandle Valley was altogether out of keeping with her mood. She ought, she felt, to be gazing out upon a landscape riven by coal-mines and disfigured by slag heaps.

The train stopped at a station. Bathed in sunshine it looked horribly cheerful. Its platform was deserted, except for a small white dog which was scratching itself with a disgustingly contented smile. The spectacle revolted her, and she moved across to the far side of the compartment.

As the train started again—which it did with a jerk, as if it were annoyed about something—her carriage door was wrenched open, and somebody got in. This was the last straw! Now, she supposed, she would have to spend her time refusing the conversational gambits of some garrulous old spinster, or other pest! She gazed resolutely out of the window.

Then it occurred to her that garrulous old spinsters don't, as a rule, wrench open doors and enter moving trains. Also, the reflection in her window-pane showed her a figure in the opposite corner which, though dim, was obviously large and male.

Shifting her position, she let her eye drift casually round the compartment, to see if her companion was the kind of large male who could be quietly ignored, or the kind that might have to be coped with later.

She gave a violent start.

Decidedly he would have to be coped with, not later but here and now.

"George!" she said, and gasped. "How on earth did you get here?"

She felt the kind of incredulous horror that a dentist's patient might experience on finding that a tooth which he had thought was safely out had returned to its post, prepared to go on giving trouble exactly as before.

"And what the devil," returned George, "do you mean by playing me such a trick?"

He glowered at her ferociously. During the last half-hour or so he had managed to lash himself into a very satisfactory passion. There was a quality in his glower which Caro did not remember to have encountered in any of the series of stand-up fights into which their engagement seemed to have degenerated. She felt a thrill—but whether of fear

or of pleasure, or a queer combination of the two, she did not give herself time to inquire. She thrust the emotion back into her sub-consciousness, and turned at bay.

"That's *my* business!" she said defiantly.

"Is it indeed? I'll soon show you about that, my girl!"

George advanced toward her in a attitude of menace. Again Caro felt that untimely thrill. She had never realized that George was so large. But afraid? Of George! What an idea! She was furious, that was all. Still, this certainly was a new sidelight on George's character. She suddenly began to wonder if she knew him quite as well as she had thought.

All the same, fury came uppermost. What a rotten thing it was to do, to corner her like this and threaten her with his superior brute force. If this sort of thing could be allowed to happen, what, Caro demanded of herself, was civilization for?

She glanced about her, and her eye fell on a notice which the L. & H.C. Railway, in an unwonted fit of levity, had put into verse for her benefit.

To stop the train (said the L. & H.C.)

Pull down the chain.

It added, in prose, that if you took this advice for insufficient reason, the tariff charge was £5 a pull.

But Caro was in no mood to boggle about by-laws. At the moment her life had only one purpose—to teach George a lesson. Here was an implement handy to do it with. Very well then.

She reached up and caught hold of the chain.

"If you come one inch farther," she said through her teeth, "I'll pull!"

George laughed.

"Don't be a something fool," he said. Trusting to the fact that in ordinary life nobody pulls down chains and stops trains except in cases of murder or severe illness, he stepped forward. And Caro pulled.

For a long, awful moment they stared at each other. Then the train began to slow down.

"Well," said George. "Now you *have* done it!"

Caro released the chain, which hung down in a slack loop where only a few moments ago it had been so beautifully taut. She made some futile effort to return it to its original

position, but in vain. It continued to hang in a slack loop ; and the train continued to slow down.

"Oh George !" said Caro, suddenly abandoning her high horse and becoming a damsel in distress appealing to her natural protector. "What *shall* we do !"

George failed to adapt himself to the new attitude.

"What *can* we do ?" he asked unhelpfully. "You were going to give me in charge or something, weren't you ? Better go on with it—unless you expect me to explain that I did it for a lark, and produce a fiver."

"It'll have stopped in a second. *George !*"

There was a note of pleading in her voice which melted George to some extent.

"Oh, all right !" he said. He paused a moment to reconnoitre the situation. Then he lay down on the floor, with an air of distaste and ill-usage.

"I've fainted. Whatever happens, stick to that. I fainted, and you were frightened and called for help."

"But your clothes—they'll be filthy."

"You should have thought of that before you began pulling chains. And anyhow, why does it matter to you how filthy I get ?"

He closed his eyes coldly, as the train stopped with a final jerk.

The consternation which the pulling down of the chain had caused in the carriage was as nothing to that which it engendered in the guard's van. Mr. Cropper was in a pitiful panic. He had never had his communication chain pulled before, and had almost forgotten that such things could happen. He applied his brake with the feeling that he was probably signing his own death-warrant. As the train slowed down, he remembered the hefty build of that tousled young man, glanced at his own inconsiderable frame, and shivered.

Nevertheless, duty called. And if it was fate's decree that he should suffer, at least he had the consolation that he would suffer in a worthy cause—for the girl was really a very pretty girl indeed.

As he trotted along beside the line, he hoped that Tom Taylor would have the impulse to come to his assistance.

He needed a man of action. But Tom merely hung a surprised face out of his cab and did not move. As for the handful of passengers, not one of them even troubled to look out of the window. Stoppages on the Wandle Valley Branch were not infrequent, and the Wandle Valley intellect was slow to react even to an emotion so universal as curiosity. Fred Cropper felt very lonely as he arrived at the fatal compartment. Guards on American trains, he seemed to remember from the films, carried guns. He thought it an excellent idea.

He climbed up, peeped in—and nearly fell off the foot-board. The girl was standing up, with her back to him. The hefty young man lay at her feet. She had knocked him out! Heavens, what a girl!

Relief surged through Fred Cropper's soul. He suddenly found himself capable of dealing with the situation. He opened the carriage-door firmly.

The girl turned.

"Oh, Guard," she said. "I—I hope you don't mind, but I pulled the chain. You see, this gentleman fainted, and I didn't know quite what to do."

(Fainted! thought Mr. Cropper sardonically. Evidently the girl was frightened of the effects of her deed. He must reassure her.)

He bent down and felt the young man's heart. It was beating. Indeed, it was pounding heavily.

"It's all right, miss. You haven't hurt him. He's alive all right. You're a brave young lady—what did you hit him with?"

"I *haven't* hit him." Her astonishment, thought Mr. Cropper, was very cleverly put on. "He fainted, I tell you."

"No need to say that, miss, really there isn't. Anything you done, you done in self-defence. Ugly looking customer, too."

"But I didn't do anything. This gentleman's my—er—he's a—a friend of mine."

Mr. Cropper, noticing her hesitation over the word "friend," drew his own conclusions. Now that the danger was past, she wanted to avoid getting mixed up in a nasty affair. He could appreciate that. But it was his duty to the company not to allow this miscreant to get off scot free; and

it was his duty to himself to get any credit that might be going.

Tom Taylor's grimy and puzzled face appeared at this point outside the window.

"What's up, Fred?"

"Young lady been set on, Tom. She laid him out good and proper, an' now she wants to make out he's a friend of hers."

"But he *is* a friend of mine," Caro interrupted wildly. "We were travelling together."

Mr. Cropper pounced like a cross-examining counsel.

"There you are, Tom. He *wasn't* travellin' with her. I seen him watching her out o' window at Halston, an' creepin' along the platform at Dogferry to get in beside her."

"Ah," said Tom. "'E looks that sort."

This was acute of Mr. Taylor, for he was not in a position to see more of George than his right boot. Caro turned on him indignantly.

"He isn't that sort, I tell you. He's my fiancé."

Fred Cropper shook his head, as one who had come sorrowfully to the conclusion that he could not believe a single syllable that this girl said.

"You said friend just now," he pointed out. "No, miss, I'm sorry, but we got our dooty to do. Let's get him out of the carriage, Tom."

Angry and bewildered, Caro sank down on to the seat. Horrid pictures of police-court proceedings began to pass through her mind.

What could she say or do, now that she was a discredited witness? George might have an idea; but George was committed to remaining an inert mass, and was now being lifted out of the carriage, none too gently, by the big engine-driver and the little guard. George evidently realized that it would be better for him to remain in his faint until she had succeeded, somehow or other, in making the atmosphere less hostile towards him. But how?

They laid George on the grass at the side of the line, and Caro heard the engine-driver say:

"What we got to do now, Fred, is bring 'im to an' then ask 'im what the 'ell 'e means by it. You stand by to bash 'im if 'e tries anything before I get back."

He departed towards the engine on some mysterious errand.

Meanwhile, Wandle Valley had begun to realize that something unusual was up. The passengers were beginning to leave the train and gather round; and a low muttering showed that they were hearing with indignation the guard's highly-coloured version of what had happened.

The muttering grew louder, the indignation deeper. Caro remembering lurid tales she had heard of slow but fierce rustic passions, decided that the time had come for drastic, even dramatic, action.

She leapt from the carriage, and suddenly appeared, standing over the recumbent George and facing the citizenry as Mark Antony did over the body of Caesar.

"Listen!" she said imperiously. "You must listen—all of you. You're making a horrible mistake. This gentleman was my fiancé. This morning we quarrelled, and I broke the engagement and ran away. He followed me, and when he got to my carriage, he fainted. And that's all that happened."

She paused.

The urgency of her words had penetrated the Wandle Valley intellect. If the young chap really had behaved like this, pondered Wandle Valley, then perhaps young chap was not quite such a villain after all. Indeed, young chap was not so much a villain as one of these here great lovers you see on the pictures. Wandle Valley, its dramatic sense pleasantly titillated, waited for the next step.

Caro, who had done a good deal of amateur acting in her time, could feel that she was holding her audience. Suddenly she realized that what was now wanted was a stroke of pure theatre. Well, why not? Since her linen was being washed in public anyhow, let it be washed thoroughly, and with a flourish.

She crossed her hands on her breast and looked demurely down.

"You see," she said, with an effective catch in her voice, "I love him!"

An ill-timed smile appeared on George's face. Whether it signified gratification or derision Caro did not wait to consider. She delivered a powerful but surreptitious kick to George's short ribs, and the smile was obliterated.

Wandle Valley was impressed. It recognized the familiar signs. The downcast eyes, the blush of modesty (really of shame, but Wandle Valley was not to know that)—such were the known tokens of maidenly surrender. Mr. Cropper's romantic soul was specially touched. His late monstrous suspicions of this admirable young man were now quite gone. He felt, dimly, that it would be a fit conclusion if the young man now came to himself in time for the final embrace and fade-out.

Caro, not at all dimly, felt the same. It was all very well for George to be careful, but she felt he was now carrying caution to a ridiculous extreme. She gave expression to this feeling with another surreptitious but well-aimed kick. George gave a convulsive movement and a realistic groan, and played up.

He opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, in the accepted form for these occasions.

Then he raised himself on his elbow.

"Caro darling!" he said, and flopped back on to the ground and closed his eyes once more.

Mr. Cropper, and the rest, scarce forbore to cheer. The scene was going well. What is more, it would probably have continued to go well, but for Tom Taylor, who broke in upon it at this point.

That single-minded man of action, bent on his scheme for bringing George to and then asking what the 'ell 'e meant by it, had gone in search of water.

Such water as he had on his engine was hissing hot, and unsuitable as a cure for fainting fits. He had therefore taken an empty coal-bucket, and had filled it at a brackish marsh-pool which bordered on the railway embankment. The fluid thus obtained was muddy, and moreover had proved a fertile breeding-ground for duckweed and a nursery for myriads of tiny tadpoles. Also, the bucket had a rich deposit of coal-dust on its sides.

However, Mr. Taylor was in no mood to consider the finer feelings of the kind of young man who annoyed beautiful girls in trains. He strode into the crowd and, before anybody had a chance to warn him of the change in popular opinion, discharged half of the dingy compound in his bucket into George's face.

It certainly brought the victim to. George sat up, gasping. Duckweed was in his hair, a mixture of mud and soot was running down his cheeks, tadpoles leapt uneasily in his lap. He was a pathetic sight, and all that was maternal in Caroline was roused by it. She forgot play-acting.

"George!" she cried. "Oh, George, my poor sweet!" and she gathered him in her arms.

To Mr. Taylor's intense indignation, it was he that was asked what the hell he meant by it. Wandle Valley turned on him as one man. Not only had he committed an unprovoked assault on an innocent man, but he had spoilt the only romantic close-up that Wandle Valley was ever likely to see in real life with a piece of vulgar slap-stick. Wandle Valley was annoyed with Mr. Taylor, and said so.

Thereupon Mr. Taylor lost his temper in his turn, issued an ultimatum that if Wandle Valley wasn't back in its places in two twos, he would take the train on to Templeton without it. He strode back to his engine, every inch the man of action, and Wandle Valley forgot righteous indignation in an undignified scramble for seats.

Of all this, Caro and George were beautifully unconscious. They had shared the mud, the soot, the duckweed and the tadpoles between them with such impartiality that it would have been difficult for an uninstructed observer to decide which had been Mr. Taylor's original patient, and were now standing up hand in hand, bedraggled but blissful. Lost in a world of their own, they were busy planning a future which took no account of the immediate necessity of getting to Templeton Junction.

Mr. Taylor gave a warning toot on his whistle. They did not hear it. Mr. Cropper walked over to them, and gave a deferential cough. He might have been the Invisible Man for all the notice they took of him.

"Then you'll marry me at once, darling?"

"I'll marry you to-morrow, if we can get a special licence in the time."

"Excuse me, miss . . ."

"And you won't mind being poor?"

"So long as I've got you, I don't mind anything. I knew it when I saw your poor face all covered with mud and stuff."

"Excuse me, miss, but . . ."

"What fools we've been all this time!"

"What utter fools!"

"If you'll pardon me, sir . . ."

"But we've come to our senses at last!"

"Darling!"

"Sweetheart!"

"Please, miss . . ."

"I say," said George, coming to earth suddenly. "We'd better get back into the train, or it'll be going on without us!"

They scrambled to their feet and dashed for their carriage, leaving the Invisible Man following forlornly behind.

THE DEMON POPE



RICHARD GARNETT

RICHARD GARNETT, born in 1835, was an eminent scholar and essayist. He was appointed superintendent of the British Museum reading-room in 1875. He was the father of Edward Garnett, author of *The Breaking Point*, and grandfather of David Garnett, author of *Lady into Fox*.

THE DEMON POPE

“SO you won’t sell me your soul?” said the Devil.

“Thank you,” replied the student, “I had rather keep it myself, if it’s all the same to you.”

“But it’s not all the same to me. I want it very particularly. Come, I’ll be liberal. I said twenty years. You can have thirty.”

The student shook his head.

“Forty !”

Another shake.

“Fifty !”

As before.

“Now,” said the Devil, “I know I’m going to do a foolish thing, but I cannot bear to see a clever, spirited young man throw himself away. I’ll make you another kind of offer. We won’t have any bargain at present, but I will push you on in the world for the next forty years. This day forty years I come back and ask you for a boon ; not your soul, mind, or anything not perfectly in your power to grant. If you give it, we are quits ; if not, I fly away with you. What say you to this ?”

The student reflected for some minutes. “Agreed,” he said at last.

Scarcely had the Devil disappeared, which he did instantaneously, ere a messenger reined in his smoking steed at the gate of the University of Cordova (the judicious reader will already have remarked that Lucifer could never have been allowed inside a Christian seat of learning), and, inquiring for the student Gerbert, presented him with the Emperor Otho’s nomination to the Abbacy of Bobbio, in consideration, said the document, of his virtue and learning, well-nigh miraculous in one so young. Such messengers were frequent visitors during Gerbert’s prosperous career. Abbot, bishop, archbishop, cardinal, he was ultimately enthroned Pope on

April 2, 999, and assumed the appellation of Silvester the Second. It was then a general belief that the world would come to an end in the following year, a catastrophe which to many seemed the more imminent from the election of a chief pastor whose celebrity as a theologian, though not inconsiderable, by no means equalled his reputation as a necromancer.

The world, notwithstanding, revolved scatheless through the dreaded twelvemonth, and early in the first year of the eleventh century Gerbert was sitting peacefully in his study, perusing a book of magic. Volumes of algebra, astrology, alchemy, Aristotelian philosophy, and other such light reading filled his book-case; and on a table stood an improved clock of his invention, next to his introduction of the Arabic numerals—his chief legacy to posterity. Suddenly a sound of wings was heard, and Lucifer stood by his side.

"It is a long time," said the fiend, "since I have had the pleasure of seeing you. I have now called to remind you of our little contract, concluded this day forty years."

"You remember," said Silvester, "that you are not to ask anything exceeding my power to perform."

"I have no such intention," said Lucifer. "On the contrary, I am about to solicit a favour which can be bestowed by you alone. You are Pope; I desire that you would make me a cardinal."

"In the expectation, I presume," returned Gerbert, "of becoming Pope on the next vacancy."

"An expectation," replied Lucifer, "which I may most reasonably entertain, considering my enormous wealth, my proficiency in intrigue, and the present condition of the Sacred College."

"You would doubtless," said Gerbert, "endeavour to subvert the foundations of the Faith, and, by a course of profligacy and licentiousness, render the Holy See odious and contemptible."

"On the contrary," said the fiend, "I would extirpate heresy, and all learning and knowledge as inevitably tending thereunto. I would suffer no man to read but the priest, and confine his reading to his breviary. I would burn your books together with your bones on the first convenient opportunity. I would observe an austere propriety of conduct, and be especially careful not to loosen one rivet in the tremendous yoke I was forging for the minds and consciences of mankind."

"If it be so," said Gerbert, "let's be off!"

"What!" exclaimed Lucifer. "You are willing to accompany me to the infernal regions!"

"Assuredly, rather than be accessory to the burning of Plato and Aristotle, and give place to the darkness against which I have been contending all my life."

"Gerbert," replied the demon, "this is arrant trifling. Know you not that no good man can enter my dominions? That, were such a thing possible, my empire would become intolerable to me, and I should be compelled to abdicate?"

"I do know it," said Gerbert, "and hence I have been able to receive your visit with composure."

"Gerbert," said the Devil, with tears in his eyes, "I put it to you—is this fair, is this honest? I undertake to promote your interests in the world; I fulfil my promise abundantly. You obtain through my instrumentality a position to which you could never otherwise have aspired. Often have I had a hand in the election of a pope, but never before have I contributed to confer the tiara on one eminent for virtue and learning. You profit by my assistance to the full, and now take advantage of an adventitious circumstance to deprive me of my reasonable guerdon. It is my constant experience that the good people are much more slippery than the sinners, and drive much harder bargains."

"Lucifer," answered Gerbert, "I have always sought to treat you as a gentleman, hoping that you would approve yourself such in return. I will not inquire whether it was entirely in harmony with this character to seek to intimidate me into compliance with your demand by threatening me with a penalty which you well knew could not be enforced. I will overlook this little irregularity, and concede even more than you have requested. You have asked to be a cardinal. I will make you Pope——"

"Ha!" exclaimed Lucifer, and an internal glow suffused his sooty hide, as the light of a fading ember is revived by breathing upon it.

"For twelve hours," continued Gerbert. "At the expiration of that time we will consider the matter further; and if, as I anticipate, you are more anxious to divest yourself of the Papal dignity than you were to assume it, I promise to bestow upon you any boon you may ask within my power to grant, and not plainly inconsistent with religion or morals."

"Done!" cried the demon. Gerbert uttered some cabalistic words, and in a moment the apartment held two Pope Silvesters, entirely indistinguishable save by their attire, and the fact that one limped slightly with the left foot.

"You will find the Pontifical apparel in this cupboard," said Gerbert, and, taking his book of magic with him, he retreated through a masked door to a secret chamber. As the door closed behind him he chuckled, and muttered to himself, "Poor old Lucifer! Sold again!"

If Lucifer was sold he did not seem to know it. He approached a large slab of silver which did duty as a mirror, and contemplated his personal appearance with some dissatisfaction.

"I certainly don't look half so well without my horns," he soliloquized, "and I am sure I shall miss my tail most grievously."

A tiara and a train, however, made fair amends for the deficient appendages, and Lucifer now looked every inch a Pope. He was about to call the master of the ceremonies, and summon a consistory, when the door was burst open, and seven cardinals, brandishing poniards, rushed into the room.

"Down with the sorcerer!" they cried, as they seized and gagged him.

"Death to the Saracen!"

"Practises algebra, and other devilish arts!"

"Knows Greek!"

"Talks Arabic!"

"Reads Hebrew!"

"Burn him!"

"Smother him!"

"Let him be deposed by a general council," said a young and inexperienced cardinal.

"Heaven forbid!" said an old and wary one, *sotto voce*.

Lucifer struggled frantically, but the feeble frame he was doomed to inhabit for the next eleven hours was speedily exhausted. Bound and helpless, he swooned away.

"Brethren," said one of the senior cardinals, "it hath been delivered by the exorcists that a sorcerer or other individual in league with the demon doth usually bear upon his person some visible token of his infernal compact. I propose that we forthwith institute a search for this stigma, the discovery of

which may contribute to justify our proceedings in the eyes of the world."

"I heartily approve of our brother Anno's proposition," said another, "the rather as we cannot possibly fail to discover such a mark, if, indeed, we desire to find it."

The search was accordingly instituted, and had not proceeded far ere a simultaneous yell from all the seven cardinals indicated that their investigation had brought more to light than they had ventured to expect.

The Holy Father had a cloven foot !

For the next five minutes the cardinals remained utterly stunned, silent, and stupefied with amazement. As they gradually recovered their faculties it would have become manifest to a nice observer that the Pope had risen very considerably in their good opinion.

"This is an affair requiring very mature deliberation," said one.

"I always feared that we might be proceeding too precipitately," said another.

"It is written, 'the devils believe'," said a third : "the Holy Father, therefore, is not a heretic at any rate."

"Brethren," said Anno, "this affair, as our brother Benno well remarks, doth indeed call for mature deliberation. I therefore propose that, instead of smothering his Holiness with cushions, as originally contemplated, we immure him for the present in the dungeon adjoining hereunto, and, after spending the night in meditation and prayer, resume the consideration of the business to-morrow morning."

"Informing the officials of the palace," said Benno, "that his Holiness has retired for his devotions, and desires on no account to be disturbed."

"A pious fraud," said Anno, "which not one of the Fathers would for a moment have scrupled to commit."

The cardinals accordingly lifted the still insensible Lucifer, and bore him carefully, almost tenderly, to the apartment appointed for his detention. Each would fain have lingered in hopes of his recovery, but each felt that the eyes of his six brethren were upon him : and all, therefore, retired simultaneously, each taking a key of the cell.

Lucifer regained consciousness almost immediately afterwards. He had the most confused idea of the circumstances which had involved him in his present scrape, and could only

say to himself that if they were the usual concomitants of the Papal dignity, these were by no means to his taste, and he wished he had been made acquainted with them sooner. The dungeon was not only perfectly dark, but horribly cold, and the poor Devil in his present form had no latent store of infernal heat to draw upon. His teeth chattered, he shivered in every limb, and felt devoured with hunger and thirst. There is much probability in the assertion of some of his biographers that it was on this occasion that he invented ardent spirits ; but, even if he did, the mere conception of a glass of brandy could only increase his sufferings. So the long January night wore wearily on, and Lucifer seemed likely to expire from inanition, when a key turned in the lock, and Cardinal Anno cautiously glided in, bearing a lamp, a loaf, half a cold roast kid, and a bottle of wine.

"I trust," he said, bowing courteously, "that I may be excused any slight breach of etiquette of which I may render myself culpable from the difficulty under which I labour of determining whether, under present circumstances, 'your Holiness' or 'your Infernal Majesty' be the form of address most befitting me to employ."

"Bub-ub-bub-boo," went Lucifer, who still had the gag in his mouth.

"Heavens !" exclaimed the Cardinal. "I crave your Infernal Holiness's forgiveness. What a lamentable oversight !"

■ And, relieving Lucifer of his gag and bonds, he set out the refection, upon which the demon fell voraciously.

"Why the devil, if I may so express myself," pursued Anno, "did not your Holiness inform us that you *were* the Devil ? Not a hand would then have been raised against you. I have myself been seeking all my life for the audience now happily vouchsafed me. Whence this mistrust of your faithful Anno, who has served you so loyally and zealously these many years ?"

Lucifer pointed significantly to the gag and fetters.

"I shall never forgive myself," protested the cardinal, "for the part I have borne in this unfortunate transaction. Next to ministering to your Majesty's bodily necessities, there is nothing I have so much at heart as to express my penitence. But I entreat your Majesty to remember that I believed myself to be acting in your Majesty's interest by overthrowing a magician who was accustomed to send your Majesty upon

errands, and who might at any time enclose you in a box and cast you into the sea. It is deplorable that your Majesty's most devoted servants should have been thus misled."

"Reasons of State," suggested Lucifer.

"I trust that they no longer operate," said the Cardinal. "However, the Sacred College is now fully possessed of the whole matter: it is therefore unnecessary to pursue this department of the subject further. I would now humbly crave leave to confer with your Majesty, or rather, perhaps, your Holiness, since I am about to speak of spiritual things, on the important and delicate point of your Holiness's successor. I am ignorant how long your Holiness proposes to occupy the Apostolic chair; but of course you are aware that public opinion will not suffer you to hold it for a term exceeding that of the pontificate of Peter. A vacancy, therefore, must one day occur; and I am humbly to represent that the office could not be filled by one more congenial than myself to the present incumbent, or on whom he could more fully rely to carry out in every respect his views and intentions."

And the Cardinal proceeded to detail various circumstances of his past life, which certainly seemed to corroborate his assertion. He had not, however, proceeded far ere he was disturbed by the grating of another key in the lock, and had just time to whisper impressively, "Beware of Benno," ere he dived under a table.

Benno was also provided with a lamp, wine, and cold viands. Warned by the other lamp and the remains of Lucifer's repast that some colleague had been beforehand with him, and not knowing how many more might be in the field, he came briefly to the point as regarded the Papacy, and preferred his claim in much the same manner as Anno. While he was earnestly cautioning Lucifer against this Cardinal as one who could and would cheat the very Devil himself, another key turned in the lock, and Benno escaped under the table, where Anno immediately inserted his finger into his right eye. The little squeal consequent upon this occurrence Lucifer successfully smothered by a fit of coughing.

Cardinal No. 3, a Frenchman, bore a Bayonne ham, and exhibited the same disgust as Benno on seeing himself forestalled. So far as his requests transpired they were moderate, but no one knows where he would have stopped if he had not been scared by the advent of Cardinal No. 4. Up to this time

he had only asked for an inexhaustible purse, power to call up the Devil *ad libitum*, and a ring of invisibility to allow him free access to his mistress, who was unfortunately a married woman.

Cardinal No. 4 chiefly wanted to be put into the way of poisoning Cardinal No. 5 ; and Cardinal No. 5 preferred the same petition as respected Cardinal No. 4.

Cardinal No. 6, an Englishman, demanded the reversion of the Archbishoprics of Canterbury and York, with the faculty of holding them together, and of unlimited non-residence. In the course of his harangue he made use of the phrase *non obstantibus*, of which Lucifer immediately took a note.

What the seventh cardinal would have solicited is not known, for he had hardly opened his mouth when the twelfth hour expired, and Lucifer, regaining his vigour with his shape, sent the Prince of the Church spinning to the other end of the room, and split the marble table with a single stroke of his tail. The six crouched and huddling cardinals cowered revealed to one another, and at the same time enjoyed the spectacle of his Holiness darting through the stone ceiling, which yielded like a film to his passage, and closed up afterwards as if nothing had happened. After the first shock of dismay they unanimously rushed to the door, but found it bolted on the outside. There was no other exit, and no means of giving an alarm. In this emergency the demeanour of the Italian cardinals set a bright example to their ultramontane colleagues. "*Bisogna pazienza*," they said, as they shrugged their shoulders. Nothing could exceed the mutual politeness of Cardinals Anno and Benno, unless that of the two who had sought to poison each other. The Frenchman was held to have gravely derogated from good manners by alluding to this circumstance, which had reached his ears while he was under the table : and the Englishman swore so outrageously at the plight in which he found himself that the Italians then and there silently registered a vow that none of his nation should ever be Pope, a maxim which, with one exception, has been observed to this day.

Lucifer, meanwhile, had repaired to Silvester, whom he found arrayed in all the insignia of his dignity ; of which, as he remarked, he thought his visitor had probably had enough.

"I should think so indeed," replied Lucifer. "But at the

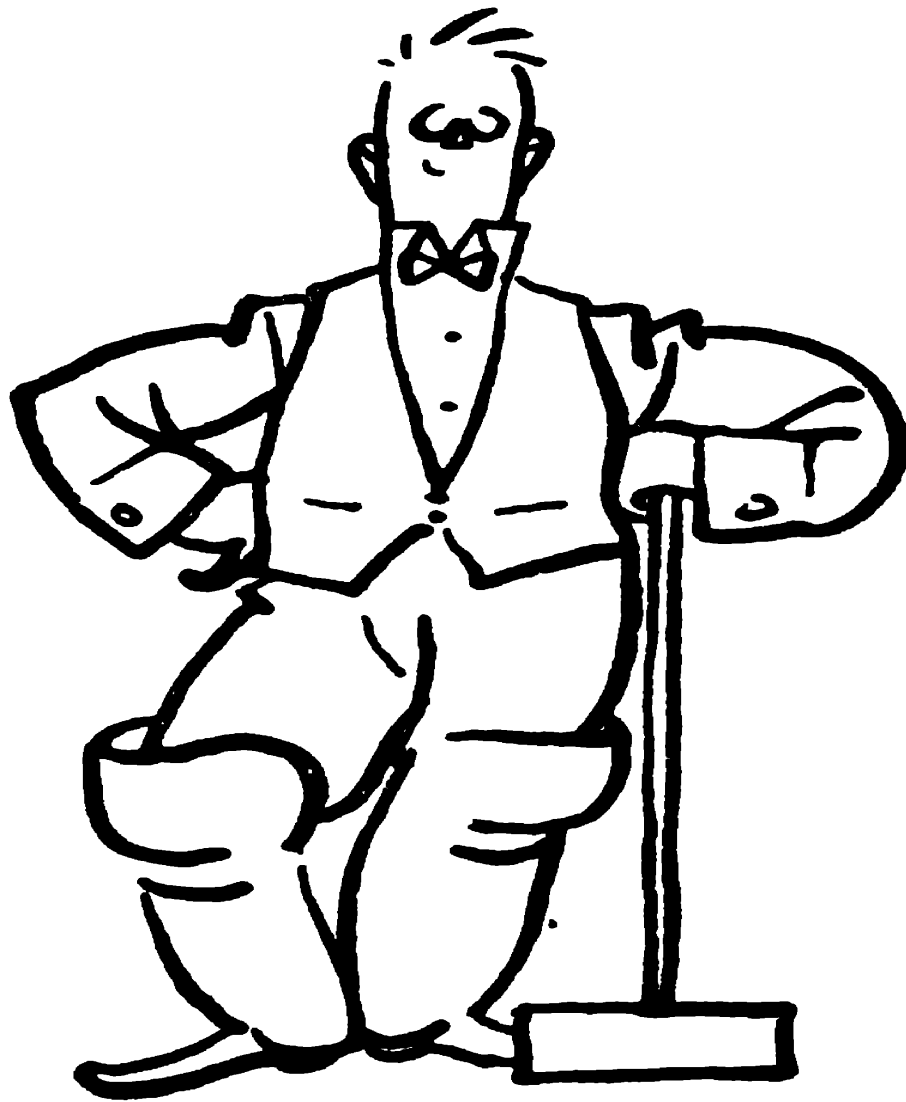
same time I feel myself fully repaid for all I have undergone by the assurance of the loyalty of my friends and admirers, and the conviction that it is needless for me to devote any considerable amount of personal attention to ecclesiastical affairs. I now claim the promised boon, which it will be in no way inconsistent with thy functions to grant, seeing that it is a work of mercy. I demand that the cardinals be released, and that their conspiracy against thee, by which I alone suffered, be buried in oblivion."

"I hoped you would carry them all off," said Gerbert, with an expression of disappointment.

"Thank you," said the Devil. "It is more to my interest to leave them where they are."

So the dungeon door was unbolted, and the cardinals came forth, sheepish and crestfallen. If, after all, they did less mischief than Lucifer had expected from them, the cause was their entire bewilderment by what had passed, and their utter inability to penetrate the policy of Gerbert, who henceforth devoted himself even with ostentation to good works. They could never quite satisfy themselves whether they were speaking to the Pope or to the Devil, and when under the latter impression habitually emitted propositions which Gerbert justly stigmatized as rash, temerarious, and scandalous. They plagued him with allusions to certain matters mentioned in their interviews with Lucifer, with which they naturally but erroneously supposed him to be conversant, and worried him by continual nods and titterings as they glanced at his nether extremities. To abolish this nuisance, and at the same time silence sundry unpleasant rumours which had somehow got abroad, Gerbert devised the ceremony of kissing the Pope's feet, which, in a grievously mutilated form, endures to this day. The stupefaction of the cardinals on discovering that the Holy Father had lost his hoof surpasses all description, and they went to their graves without having obtained the least insight into the mystery.

THE RABBITS



A. A. MILNE

A. A. MILNE was for several years assistant editor of *Punch*, to which he contributed many humorous sketches and articles. Since the war he has turned his attention to the theatre, and many of his plays have had successful runs. He is also, of course, the creator of that celebrated character "Winnie-the-Pooh."

THE RABBITS

I

"**B**y Hobbs," cried Archie, as he began to put away the porridge, "I feel as fit as anything this morning. I'm absolutely safe for a century."

"You shouldn't boast with your mouth full," Myra told her brother.

"It wasn't quite full," pleaded Archie, "and I really am good for runs to-day."

"You will make," I said, "exactly fourteen."

"Hallo, good morning. Didn't see you were there."

"I have been here all the time. Fourteen."

"It seems a lot," said Myra doubtfully.

Archie laughed in scorn.

"The incoming batsman," I began, "who seemed in no way daunted by the position of affairs——"

"Five hundred for nine," put in Myra.

"——reached double figures for the fourth time this season, with a lofty snick to the boundary. Then turning his attention to the slow bowler he despatched him between his pads and the wicket for a couple. This, however, was his last scoring stroke, as in the same over he played forward to a long hop and fell a victim to the vigilance of the wicket-keeper."

"For nearly a quarter of an hour," continued Myra, "he had defied the attack, and the character of his batting may be easily judged from the fact that his score included one five——"

"Four from an overthrow," I added in parenthesis.

"And one four. Save for a chance to mid-on before he had scored, and another in the slips when seven, his innings was almost entirely free from blemish——"

"Although on one occasion he had the good fortune,

when playing back to a half-volley, to strike the wicket without dislodging the bails."

"See to-morrow's *Sportsman*," concluded Myra.

"Oh, you children," laughed Archie, as he walked over to inspect the ham. "Bless you."

Miss Fortescue gave a little cough and began to speak. Miss Fortescue is one of those thoroughly good girls who take an interest in everything. A genuine trier. On this occasion she said: "I often wonder who it is who writes those accounts in the *Sportsman*."

"It is believed to be Mr. Simpson," said Archie.

Simpson looked up with a start, and jerked his glasses into his tea. He fished them out and wiped them thoughtfully.

"The credible," he began, "is rarely——"

"Gentlemen, I pray you silence for Mr. Simpson's epigram," cried Archie.

"Oh, I always thought Mr. Simpson wrote verses in the *Saturday Review*," said Miss Fortescue in the silence which followed.

"As a relaxation only," I explained. "The other is his life-work. We read him with great interest; that bit about the heavy roller being requisitioned is my favourite line."

"Mr. Simpson and Killick and Crawford all play in glasses," put in Myra eagerly, across the table.

"That is their only point in common," added Archie.

"Oh, isn't he a very good player?"

"Well, he's a thoroughly honest and punctual and sober player," I said, "but—the fact is, he and I and the Major don't make many runs nowadays. We generally give, as he has said in one of his less popular poems, a local habitation to the—er—airy nothing."

"I thought it was Shakespeare said that."

"Shakespeare or Simpson. Hallo, there's Thomas at last."

Thomas is in the Admiralty, which is why he is always late. It is a great pity that he was christened Thomas; he can never rise to the top of his profession with a name like that. You couldn't imagine a Thomas McKenna—or even a Thomas Nelson, but he doesn't seem to mind somehow.

"Morning, everybody," said Thomas. "Isn't it a beastly day?"

"We'll hoist the south cone for you," said Archie, and he balanced a mushroom upside down on the end of his fork.

"What's the matter with the day?" asked our host, the Major, still intent on his paper.

"It's so early."

"When I was a boy——"

"My father, Major Mannering," said Archie, "will now relate an anecdote of Waterloo."

But the Major was deep in his paper. Suddenly he—there is only one word for it—snorted.

"The Budget," said Myra and Archie, exchanging anxious glances.

"Ha, that's good," he said, "that's very good! "If the Chancellor of the Exchequer imagines that he can make his iniquitous Budget more acceptable to a disgusted public by treating it in a spirit of airy persiflage he is at liberty to try. But airy persiflage, when brought into contact with the determined temper of a nation——"

"Who *is* the hairy Percy, anyhow?" said Thomas to himself.

The Major glared at the interrupter for a moment. Then—for he knows his weakness, and is particularly fond of Thomas—he threw his paper down and laughed. "Well," he said, "are we going to win to-day?" And while he and Archie talked about the wicket, his daughter removed *The Times* to a safe distance.

"But there aren't eleven of you here," said Miss Fortescue to me, "and if you and Mr. Simpson and Major Mannering aren't very good, you'll be beaten. It's against the village the first two days, isn't it?"

"When I said we weren't very good, I only meant we didn't make many runs. Mr. Simpson is a noted fast bowler, the Major has a M.C.C. scarf, which can be seen quite easily at point, and I keep wicket. Between us we dismiss many a professor. Just as they are shaping for a cut, you know, they catch sight of the Major's scarf, lose their heads and give me an easy catch. Then Archie and Thomas take centuries, one of the gardeners bends them from the off and makes them swim a bit, the Vicar of his plenty is lending us

two sons, Tony and Dahlia Blair come down this morning, and there is a chauffeur who plays for keeps. How many is that ?”

“Eleven, isn’t it ?”

“It ought only to be ten,” said Myra, who had overheard.

“Oh yes, I was counting Miss Blair,” said Miss Fortescue.

“We never play more than ten a side,” said Archie.

“Oh, why ?”

“So as to give the scorer an extra line or two for the byes.”

Myra laughed ; then, catching my eye, looked preternaturally solemn.

“If you’ve quite finished breakfast, Mr. Gaukrodger,” she said, “there’ll be just time for me to beat you at croquet before the Rabbits take the field.”

“Right O,” I said.

Of course, you know, my name isn’t really Gaukrodger.

II

The Major has taken a great deal of trouble with his ground, and the result pleases everybody. If you are a batsman you applaud the short boundaries ; if you are a wicket-keeper (as I am), and Thomas is bowling what he is pleased to call googlies, you have leisure to study some delightful scenery ; and if you are a left-handed bowler, with a delivery outside the screen, there is behind you a belt of trees which you cannot fail to admire. When Archie was born, and they announced the fact to the Major, his first question was (so I understand), “Right or left handed ?” They told him “Left” to quiet him, and he went out and planted a small forest, so that it should be ready for Archibald’s action when he grew up. Unfortunately, Archie turned out to be no bowler at all (in my opinion)—and right-handed at that. Nemesis, as the ha’penny papers say.

“Well ?” we all asked, when Archie came back from tossing.

“They lost, and put us in.”

“Good man.”

“May I have my sixpence back ?” I said. “You haven’t bent it or anything, have you ? Thanks.”

As the whole pavilion seemed to be full of people putting on their pads in order to go in first, I wandered outside. There I met Myra.

"Hallo, we're in," I said. "Come and sit on the roller with me, and I'll tell you all about Jayes."

"Can't for a moment. Do go and make yourself pleasant to Dahlia Blair. She's just come."

"Do you think she'd be interested in Jayes? I mean the Leicestershire cricketer, not the disinfectant. Oh, all right, then, I won't."

I wandered over to the deck-chairs, and exchanged greetings with Miss Blair.

"I have been asked to make myself pleasant," I said. "I suppose that means telling you all about everybody, doesn't it?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, we're in, as you see. That's the Vicar leading his team out. He's no player really—one of the 'among others we noticed.' But he's a good father, and we've borrowed two offsprings from him. Here comes Archie and Wilks. Wilks drove you from the station, I expect?"

"He did. And very furiously."

"Well, he hardly drives at all, when he's in. He's terribly slow—what they call Nature's reaction. Archie, you will be sorry to hear, has just distinguished himself by putting me in last. He called it ninth wicket down, but I worked it out, and there doesn't seem to be anybody after me. It's simply spite."

"I hope Mr. Archie makes some runs," said Dahlia. "I don't mind so much about Wilks, you know."

"I'm afraid he is only going to make fourteen to-day. That's the postman going to bowl to him. He has two deliveries, one at 8 a.m. and one at 12.30 p.m.—the second one is rather doubtful. Archie always takes guard with the bail, you observe, and then looks round to see if we're all watching."

"Don't be so unkind."

"I'm annoyed," I said, "and I intensely dislike the name Archibald. Ninth wicket down!"

The umpire having called "Play," Joe, the postman, bounded up to the wicket and delivered the ball. Archie played forward with the easy confidence of a school

professional when nobody is bowling to him. And then the leg-bail disappeared.

"Oh!" cried Dahlia. "He's out!"

I looked at her, and I looked at Archie's disconsolate back as he made for the pavilion; and I knew what he would want. I got up.

"I must go now," I said. "I've promised to sit on the heavy roller for a bit. Archie will be here in a moment. Will you tell him from me that we both thought he wasn't quite ready for that one, and that it never rose an inch? Thank you very much."

I discovered Myra, and we sat on the roller together.

"Well, I've been making myself pleasant," I said. "And then when Archie got out I knew he'd want to sit next to her, so I came away. That is what they call tact in *The Lady*."

"Archie is rather fond of her," said Myra. "I don't know if——"

"Yes, yes, I understand. Years ago——"

"Let's see. Are you ninety or ninety-one? I always forget."

"Ninety-one next St. Crispin's Day. I'm sorry Archie's out. 'The popular cricketer was unfortunate enough to meet a trimmer first ball, and the silent sympathy of the Bank Holiday crowd went out to him as he wended his way to the Pavilion.' Extract from '*Pavilions I have wended to*, by Percy Benskin.' Help! There goes Blair!"

After this the situation became very serious. In an hour seven of us had got what I might call the postman's knock. Wilks was still in, but he had only made nine. The score was fifty-two, thanks entirely to Simpson, who had got thirty-five between first and second slip in twenty minutes. This stroke of his is known as the Simpson upper cut, and is delivered straight from the shoulder and off the edge of the bat.

"This is awful," said Myra. "You'll simply have to make some now."

"I think it's time Wilks got on to his second speed. Why doesn't somebody tell him? Hallo, there goes John. I knew there wasn't a run there. Where are my gloves?"

"You mustn't be nervous. Oh, *do* make some."

"The condemned man walked firmly to the wickets.

'What is that, umpire?' he asked in his usual cool voice. 'Houtside the leg stump, sir,' said the man in white. 'Good,' he replied. . . . What an ass your second gardener is. Fancy being potted out like that, just as if he were a geranium. I ought to wear a cap, oughtn't I, in case I want to bow when I come in. Good-bye; I shall be back for lunch, I expect.'

I passed Joe on my way to the wickets, and asked pleasantly after his wife and family. He was rather brusque about it, and sent down a very fast half-volley which kept low. Then Wilks and I returned to the pavilion together amid cheers. On the whole, the Rabbits had lived up to their reputation.

"Well, we *are* a lot of bunnies," said Archie at lunch. "Joe simply stands there looking like a lettuce and out we all trot. We shall have to take to halma or something. Simpson, you swim, don't you?"

"You don't have to swim at halma," said Simpson.

"Anyhow," said Blair, "we can't blame the Selection Committee."

"I blame Thomas," I said. "He would have eight, and he wouldn't wait. I don't blame myself, because my average is now three spot five, and yesterday it was only three spot one."

"That is impossible, if you made nought to-day," said Simpson eagerly.

"Not if I divided it wrong yesterday."

"Averages," said the Major to the Vicar, catching the last sentence but two, "are the curse of modern cricket. When I was a boy——"

"This," Archie explained to us, "takes us back to the thirties, when Felix Mynn bowled Ensign Mannering with a full pitch."

"Dear old Fuller Pitch. Ah! what do they know of England, who only King and Jayes?" I declaimed. "Libretto by Simpson."

"Who's finished?" said Archie, getting up. "Come out and smoke. Now, we simply must buck up and out the opposition. Simpson ought to bump them at Joe's end, and Thomas——"

"I always swerve after lunch," said Thomas.

"I don't wonder. What I was going to say was that you

would box them in the slips. You know, if we all buck up——”

We bucked up and outed them at the end of the day for two hundred and fifty.

III

“Will somebody give me a cigarette,” said Myra, stretching out a hand.

“I fancy not,” I said. “Thomas and I both feel that you are too young.”

“I don’t really want one, but when I’m locked up in the billiard-room with two dumb men——”

“We were reflecting on our blessed victory.”

“Were you thinking of Archie’s century or John’s bowling?”

“Neither, oddly enough. I was recalling my own catch which won the match. Poetry; let’s go and tell Simpson.”

“It *was* a skier,” said Myra. “I thought it was never coming down. What did you think of all the time?”

“Everything. All my past life flashed before my eyes. I saw again my happy childhood’s days, when I played innocently in the—er—pantry. I saw myself at school, sl—working. I saw——”

“Did you happen,” interrupted Thomas, when we both thought he was fast asleep, “to see yourself being badly taken on by me at billiards?”

“Thomas, you’re not properly awake, old friend. I know that feeling. Turn over on the other side and take a deep breath.”

Thomas rose and stretched himself, and went over to the cue rack. “You should have heard him siding about his blessed billiards this morning,” he told Myra.

“I didn’t side. I simply said that anybody could beat Thomas. Do they play billiards much at the Admiralty? I should have thought the motion——”

“Take a cue. Myra will mark.”

“Rather; I can mark like anything.”

“Once upon a time,” I said, “there was a lady who wanted to get into the Admiralty. But his mother said, ‘Not until you have learnt to swim, Thomas.’ So he had a set of six private lessons for one guinea before he went in for the

examination. He came out thirty-eighth, and was offered a lucrative appointment in the post office. . . . Hence his enormous skill at billiards. Thick or clear?"

"I will adventure half a crown upon the game," said Thomas, giving a miss.

"Right O, Rothschild. Now, are you ready, marker? I'm spot. Hadn't you better oil the board a bit? Well, as long as you can work it quickly enough."

I took careful aim, and my ball went up the table and back again, with the idea, I imagine, of inspecting the wicket. It seemed quite fast.

"One all," said Myra, and Thomas kindly brought his ball and mine to the top of the table.

"I fancy I shall be able to swerve from this end," I said. I tried a delicate cannon, and just missed the object ball. "I shall find a spot directly—there's one under the red ball, I believe."

"Do try and hit something," said Myra.

"The marker is not allowed to give advice," I said sternly. "What's the matter, Thomas?"

"I'm not quite sure what to do."

"I think you ought to chalk your cue here," I said, after examining the position.

"I've done that."

"Then ram the red."

Thomas rammed and all but sank it in the left-hand pocket.

"I am now," I said, "going to do a cannon off the cushion. Marker, what is my score?"

"One, sir."

"Then kindly get ready to put it up to three. . . . Rotten luck."

"Wrong side," said Myra judicially.

"No, I meant to hit it that side."

"I mean it wanted a little running side."

"This isn't Queen's Club. Go on, Thomas."

Thomas, who had been chalking his cue, advanced to the table. "Hallo," he said, "where's the other ball?"

I looked at the table, and there were only two balls on it!

"That's an extraordinary thing," I said in amazement. "I'm almost certain we started with three."

"Did you put me down?"

"Certainly not ; I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing. I don't say I mayn't have slipped down myself when nobody was looking. Myra, did you notice which pocket I was trying for that time ?"

We felt in all of them, and at last found my ball in one of the bottom ones. It must have gone there very quietly.

"Score, marker ?" I asked confidently, as I prepared to continue my break.

"Oh, you're going over the crease," cried Myra.

I took my ball back an inch. "*Will* you tell me the score ?" I said.

"Stevenson (in play) three ; Inman, two. Inman's two were both wides."

Barely were the words out of her mouth when Inman's score was increased by a no-ball. A miss-cue they call it technically.

"Three all," said Myra. "This is awfully exciting. First one is ahead, and then the other."

"By the way, how many up are we playing ?"

"Five, aren't you ?" said Myra.

This roused Thomas. He had played himself in, and now proceeded to make a pretty break of seventeen. I followed. There was a collision off the middle pocket between spot and red, and both went down. Then plain was unintentionally sunk as the result of a cannon shot, and spot and red sailed into harbour. With Thomas's miss I scored eleven. Unfortunately, off my next stroke, Thomas again went down.

"Billiards," he said.

"You don't think I want to put the rotten thing down, do you ? It's such a blessed rabbit. Directly it sees a hole anywhere it makes for it. Hallo, six more. I shall now give what they call a miss in baulk."

"Oh, good miss," cried Myra, as spot rested over the middle pocket.

"That was a googly. You both thought it would break the other way."

The game went on slowly. When Thomas was ninety and I was ninety-nine, there was a confused noise without, and Archie and Miss Blair burst into the room. At least only Archie actually burst ; Miss Blair entered sedately.

"Who's winning ?" cried Archie.

"What an absurd question," I said. "As if we should tell you."

"All right. Dahl—Miss Blair, have you ever seen billiards played really well?"

"Never."

"Then now's your chance. Ninety-ninety-nine—they've only just begun. This is Thomas's first break, I expect. There—he's got a clear board. You get five extra for that, and the other man is rubiconed. Ninety-nine all. Now, it is only a question of who misses first."

I put down my cue.

"Thomas," I began, "we have said some hard things about each other to-night, but when I listen to Archie I feel very friendly towards you."

"Archibald," said Thomas, "is a beastly name."

"So I told Miss Blair. For a man who was, so to speak, born with a silver billiard-table in his mouth to come here and make fun of two persevering and, in my case, promising players is——"

"You'll never finish that sentence," said Myra. "Try some more billiards."

"It was almost impossible to say what I wanted to say grammatically," I answered, and I hit my ball very hard up the table at the white.

"It's working across," said Archie, after the second bounce; "it must hit the red soon. I give it three more laps."

"It's going much more slowly now," said Miss Blair.

"Probably it's keeping a bit of a sprint for the finish. Wait till it gets its second wind." No, I'm afraid it's no good; it ought to have started sooner. Hallo, yes, it's—got him!"

"It hasn't finished yet," I said calmly. "Look—there!"

"Jove!" said Archie, shaking my hand, "that's the longest loser I've ever seen. My dear old man, what a performer. The practice you must have had. The years you must have devoted to the game. I wonder—could you *possibly* spare an hour or two to-morrow to play cricket for us?"

IV

A hundred and eighty for none. The umpire waved his lily hand, and the scorer entered one more "four" in his book. Seeing that the ball had gone right through a bicycle which was leaning up against the pavilion, many people (the owner of the bicycle, anyhow) must have felt that the actual signalling of a boundary was unnecessary; but our umpire is a stickler for the etiquette of the game. Once when— But no, on second thoughts, I shan't tell you that story. You would say it was a lie—as indeed it is.

"Rotten," said Archie to me, as we crossed over. (A good captain always confides in his wicket-keeper.)

"Don't take Simpson off," I said. "I like watching him."

"I shall go on again myself soon."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that. Don't lose heart."

The score was two hundred when we met again.

"I once read a book by a lady," I said, "in which the hero started the over with his right hand and finished it with his left. I suppose Simpson couldn't do that?"

"He's a darned rotten bowler, anyway."

"His direction is all right, but his metre is so irregular.

At the end of the next over, "What shall I do?" asked Archie in despair.

"Put the wicket-keeper on," I said at once.

The idea was quite a new one to him. He considered it for a moment.

"Can you bowl?" he said at last.

"No."

"Then what on earth——"

"Look here; you've tried 'em with people who *can* bowl, and they've made two hundred and twenty in an hour and a half; somebody who can't bowl will be a little change for them. That's one reason. The second is that we shall all have a bit of a rest while I'm taking my things off. The third is that I bet Myra a shilling——"

Archie knelt down, and began to unbuckle my pads. "I'll 'keep' myself," he said. "Are you fast or slow?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Just as it occurs to me at the moment, I expect."

"Well, you're quite right ; you can't be worse than some of us. Will you have a few balls down first ?"

"No, thanks ; I should like to come as a surprise to them."

"Well, pitch 'em up anyhow."

"I shall probably vary my length—if possible without any alteration of action."

I am now approaching the incredible. The gentle reader, however, must not be nasty about it ; he should at least pretend to believe, and his best way of doing this is to listen very silently to what follows. When he has heard my explanation I shall assume that he understands.

Bowling is entirely a question of when you let go of the ball. If you let go too soon the result is a wide over the batsman's head ; if too late, a nasty crack on your own foot. Obviously there are spaces in between. By the law of averages one must let go at the right moment at least once. Why not then at the first ball ? And in the case of a person like myself, who has a very high action and a good mouth—I mean who has a very high delivery, such a ball (after a week of Simpsons and Archies) would be almost unplayable.

Very well, then ; I did let go at the right moment, but, unfortunately, I took off from the wrong crease. Then umpire's cry of "No-ball" and the shattering of the Quidnunc's wicket occurred simultaneously.

"Good ball," said Archie. "Oh, bad luck !"

I tried to look as though, on the whole, I preferred it that way—as being ultimately more likely to inspire terror in the batsman at my end. Certainly, it gave me confidence ; made me over-confident in fact, so that I held on to the next ball much too long, and it started bouncing almost at once.

The Quidnunc, who was convinced by this that he had been merely having a go at the previous ball, shouldered his bat and sneered at it. He was still sneering when it came in very quickly, and took the bottom of the leg stump. (Finger spin, chiefly.)

Archie walked up slowly, and gazed at me.

"Well ?" I said jauntily.

"No, don't speak. I just want to look, and look, and look. It's wonderful. No elastic up the sleeve, or anything."

"This is where it first pitched," said the Major, as he examined the ground.

"Did you think of letting in a brass tablet?" I inquired shortly.

"He is quite a young man," went on Archie dreamily, "and does not care to speak about his plans for the future. But he is of opinion that——"

"Break, break, break," said Simpson. "Three altogether."

"Look here, is there anybody else who wants to say anything? No? Then I'll go on with my over."

Archie, who had begun to walk back to his place, returned thoughtfully to me.

"I just wanted to say, old chap, that if you're writing home to-night about it, you might remember me to your people."

Blair was about the only person who didn't insult me. This was because he had been fielding long-on; and as soon as the wicket fell he moved round about fifty yards to talk to Miss Fortescue. What people can see in her—Well, directly my next ball was bowled he started running as hard as he could to square leg, and brought off one of the finest catches I've ever seen.

"The old square-leg trap," said Archie. "But you cut it rather fine, didn't you? I suppose you knew he was a sprinter?"

"I didn't cut it at all—I was bowling. Go away."

Yes, I confess it. I did the hat trick. It was a good length half-volley, and the batsman, who had watched my first three balls, was palpably nervous. Archie walked round and round me in silence for some time, and then went over to Thomas.

"He's playing tennis with me this evening," he began.

"I was beaten at billiards by him last night," said Thomas proudly.

"He's going to let me call him by his Christian name."

"They say he's an awfully good chap when you know him," replied Thomas.

I got another wicket with the last ball of the over, and then we had lunch. Myra was smiling all over her face when we came in, but beyond a "Well bowled, Walter" (which I believe to be Brearley's name), would have nothing to do with me. Instead she seized Archie, and talked long and eagerly to him. And they both laughed a good deal.

"Arkwright," I heard Archie say at the end. "He's sure to be there, and would do it like a shot."

Like a wise captain Archie did not put me on after lunch, and Simpson soon began to have the tail in difficulties. Just after the eighth wicket fell a telegram came out. Archie took it and handed it to me. "From Maclaren, I expect," he said with a grin.

"You funny ass; I happen to know it's from Dick. I asked him for a wire about the Kent match."

"Oh, did Kent win?" said Archie, looking over my shoulder. As I opened it, the other came up, and I read—

"Please be in attendance for next Test Match.

"Hawke."

I got three more that afternoon. One from Fry, one from Leveson-Gower, and one from Maclaren. They all came from Lord's, and I've half a mind to take my telegrams with me, and go. Then Myra would probably get six months in the second division.

"But I shouldn't mind *that*," said Myra. "You could easily bowl—I mean bail—me out."

A silly joke, I call it.

V

I selected a handkerchief, gave a last look at the weather, which was beastly, and went down (very late) to breakfast. As I opened the door there was a sudden hush. Everybody looked eagerly at me. Then Miss Fortescue tittered.

Well, you know how one feels when that happens. I put my hand quickly to my tie—it was still there. I squinted down my nose, but there was no smut. To make quite sure I went over to the glass. Then Simpson exploded.

Yet nobody spoke. They all sat there watching me, and at last I began to get nervous. I opened my mouth to say "Good morning," but before I got it out Miss Blair gave a little shriek of excitement. That upset me altogether. I walked up to the teapot, and pouring myself out a cup said, with exaggerated carelessness, "Rotten day, isn't it?"

And then came the laughter—shout after shout.

I held out my hand to Myra. "Good-bye," I said, "I'm

going home. Thank you for a very jolly time, but I'm not going to be bullied."

"Oh, you dear," she gurgled.

"I *am* rather sweet before breakfast," I admitted, "but how——"

"It was too heavenly of you. I never thought you would."

"I think I shall go back to bed."

"It was rather rough luck," said Archie, "but of course the later you are, the worse it is for you."

"And the higher the fewer. Quite so. If this is from Breakfast Table Topics in the *Daily Mirror*, I haven't seen them to-day; but I'll do my best."

"Archie, explain."

Archie took up a piece of paper from the table, and explained. "It's like this," he said. "I came down first and looked at the weather, and said——"

"Any one would," I put in quickly.

"Well, then, Blair came in and said, 'Beastly day,' and then Simpson— Well, I thought I'd write down everybody's first remark, to see if anybody let the weather alone. Here they are."

"It's awful," put in Myra, "to have one's remarks taken down straight off. I've quite forgotten what I said."

This was the list:

Archie: "Bother." (So he says.)

Blair: "What a beastly day!"

Simpson: "What a jolly day!"

The Major: "Well, not much cricket to-day, hey?"

Myra: "Oh dear, what a day!"

Miss Blair: "What a terrible day!"

Miss Fortescue: "Oh, you *poor* men—*what* a day!"

Thomas: "Rotten day, isn't it?"

Me: "Rotten day, isn't it?"

"I don't think much of Thomas's remark," I said.

Later on in the morning we met (all except the Major, that is) in the room which Myra calls hers and Archie calls the nursery, and tried to think of something to do.

"I'm not going to play bridge all day for anyone," said Archie.

"The host should lay himself out to amuse his guests," said Myra.

"Otherwise, his guests will lay him out," I warned him, "to amuse themselves."

"Well, what do you all want to do?"

"I should like to look at a photograph album," said Thomas.

"Stump cricket."

"What about hide-and-seek?"

"No, I've got it," cried Archie; "we'll be boy scouts."

"Hooray!" cried everybody else.

Archie was already on his hands and knees. "Ha!" he said, "is that the spoor of the white ant that I see before me? Spoorly not. I have but been winded by the water-beetle.

"Sound, sound the trumpet; beat the drum,
To all the scouting world proclaim
One crowded stalk upon the tum
Is worth an age without a name."

"Archie!" shrieked Myra in horror. "It is too late," she added, "all the ladies have swooned."

We arranged sides. Myra and I and Simpson and Thomas against the others. They were to start first.

"This isn't simply hide-and-seek," said Archie, as they went off. "You've got to track us fairly. We shall probably 'blaze' door-posts. When you hear the bleat of a tinned sardine that means we're ready. Keep your eyes skinned, my hearties, and heaven defend the right."

"We ought to have bare knees really," said Myra, when they'd gone. "Boy scouts always do. So that when they go through a bed of nettles they know they've been."

"I shall stalk the stairs to begin with," I said. "Simpson, you go down the back way and look as much like a vacuum-cleaner as possible. Then they won't notice you. Thomas and Myra— Hush! Listen! Was that the bleat of a fresh sardine or the tinned variety?"

"Tinned," said Myra. "Let's go."

We went. I took the Queen Anne staircase on my—in the proper stalking position. I moved very slowly, searching for spoor. Half-way down the stairs my back fin slipped and I shot over the old oak at a tremendous pace, landing in the hall like a Channel swimmer. Looking up, I saw Thomas in front of me. He was examining the door for "blazes."

Myra was next to him, her ear to the ground, listening for the gallop of horses' hoofs. I got up and went over to them.

"Hast seen aught of a comely wench in parlous case, hight Miss Dahlia?" I asked Thomas.

"Boy scouts don't talk like that," he said gruffly.

"I beg your pardon. I was thinking that I was a Cavalier and you were a Roundhead. Now I perceive that you are just an ordinary fathead."

"Why," said Myra at the foot of the stairs, "what does this button mean? Have I found a clue?"

I examined it, and then I looked at my own coat.

"You have," I said. "Somebody has been down those stairs quite recently, for the button is still warm."

"Where is Scout Simpson?"

At that moment he appeared breathless with excitement.

"I have had an adventure," he said hurriedly, without saluting. "I was on the back stairs looking like a vacuum-cleaner when suddenly Archie and Miss Blair appeared. They looked right at me, but didn't seem to penetrate my disguise. Archie, in fact, leant against me, and said to Miss Blair: 'I will now tell you of my secret mission. I carry caviare—I mean despatches—to the general. Breathe but a word of this to the enemy, and I miss the half-holiday on Saturday. Come, let us be going, but first to burn the secret code.' And—and then he struck a match on me, and burned it."

Myra gurgled and hastily looked solemn again. "Proceed, Scout Simpson," she said, "for the night approaches apace."

"Well, then they started down the stairs, and I went after them on my—scouting, you know. I made rather a noise at one corner, and Archie looked round at me, and said to Miss Blair: 'The tadpoles are out full early. See yonder where one lies basking.' And he came back, and put his foot on me and said, 'Nay, 'tis but a shadow. Let us return right hastily. Yet tarry a moment, what time I lay a false trail.' So they tarried and he wrote a note and dropped it on me. And, afterward, I got up and here it is."

"The secret despatch," cried Myra.

"It's addressed to the Scoutmistress, and it says outside: 'Private, not to be opened till Christmas Day.'"

Myra opened it and read: "Your blessed scouts are

everywhere. Let me have five minutes with her in the nursery, there's a dear. I'd do as much for you."

But she didn't read it aloud, and I didn't see it till some time afterwards. She simply put it away, and smiled, and announced that the scouts would now adjourn to the billiard-room for pemmican and other refreshments; which they did. The engagement was announced that evening.

VI

"Well," said Thomas, "how are we going to celebrate the joyful event?"

We were sitting on the lawn, watching Blair and Miss Fortescue play croquet. Archie and Dahlia were not with us; they had (I suppose) private matters to discuss. Our match did not begin for another hour, happily for the lovers; happily also for the croquet-players, who had about fifty-six hoops, posts, flags and what not to negotiate.

"It's awfully difficult to realize it," said Myra. "My own brother! Just fancy—I can hardly believe it."

"I don't think there can be any doubt," I said. "Something's happened to him, anyhow—he's promised to put me in first to-day."

"Let's have a dance to-morrow night," continued Thomas, relentlessly pursuing his original idea. "And we'll all dance with Miss Blair."

"Yes. Archie would like that."

"I remember, some years ago, when I was in Spain," said Simpson——

"This," I murmured appreciatively, "is how all the best stories begin." And I settled myself more comfortably in my chair.

"No," said Simpson, "I'm wrong there. It was in Hampstead." And he returned to his meditations.

"Tell you what," said Thomas, "you ought to write 'em an ode, Simpson."

"There's nothing that rhymes with the lady."

"There's hair." I said quite unintentionally.

"I meant with Dahlia."

"My dear man, there are heaps. Why, there's azalea."

"That's only one."

"Well, there are lots of different kinds of azalea."

"Any rhymes for Archie and Mannering?" said Simpson scornfully.

"Certainly. And Simpson. You might end with him—

'Forgive the way the metre limps on,
It's always like that with Samuel Simpson.'

You get the idea?"

"Hush," said Myra, "Miss Fortescue has passed under a hoop."

But it is time that we got on to my innings. Archie managed to win the toss, and, as he had promised, took me in with him. It was the proudest and most nervous moment of my life.

"I've never been in first before," I said, as we walked to the wickets. "Is there any little etiquette to observe?"

"Oh, rather. Especially if you're going to take first ball."

"Oh, there's no doubt about my taking the *first* ball."

"In that case the thing to remember is, that when the umpire calls 'play,' the side refusing to play loses the match."

"Then it all rests on me? Your confidence in me must be immense. I think I shall probably consent to play."

I obtained guard and took my stand at the wicket. Most cricketers nowadays, I am told, adopt the "two-eyed stance," but for myself I still stick to the good old two-legged one. It seems to be to be less wearing. My style, I should observe, blends happily the dash of a Joseph Vine with the patience of a Kenneth Hutchings; and after a long innings I find a glass of— I've forgotten the name of it now, but I know I find it very refreshing.

Being the hero (you will admit that—after my hat trick) of this true story, I feel I must describe my innings carefully. Though it only totalled seventeen, there was this to be said for it: it is the only innings of less than a hundred ever made by a hero.

It began with a cut to square leg, for which we ran a forced single, and followed on with a brace of ones in the direction of fine slip. After that, I stopped the bowler in the middle of his run-up, and signalled to a spectator to move away from the screen. This was a put-up job with

Myra, and I rather hoped they would give me something for it, but apparently they didn't. At the end of the over, I went up and talked to Archie. In first-class cricket, the batsmen often do this, and it impresses the spectators immensely.

I said, "I bet you a shilling I'm out next over."

He said, "I won't take you."

I said, "Then I huff you," and went back to my crease.

My next scoring stroke was a two-eyed hook over point's head, and then Archie hit three fours running. I had another short conversation with him, in the course of which I recited two lines from Shakespeare and asked him a small but pointed conundrum, and afterwards I placed the ball cleverly to mid-off, the agility of the fieldsmen, however, preventing any increment, unearned or otherwise. Finally, I gave my cap to the umpire, made some more ones, changed my bat, and was caught at the wicket.

"I hit it," I said, as I walked away. I said it to nobody in particular, but the umpire refused to alter his decision.

"I congratulate you," said Miss Blair, when I was sitting down again.

"I was just going to do that to you," I said.

"Oh, but you were kind enough to do that last night."

"Ah, this is extra. I've just been batting out there with your young man. Perhaps you noticed?"

"Well, I think I must have."

"Yes. Well, I wanted to tell you that I think he has quite an idea of the game, and that with more experience he would probably be good enough to play for—for Surrey. Second eleven. Yes. At hockey."

"Thank you so much. You've known him a long time, haven't you?"

"We were babes together, Madam. At least, simultaneously. We actually met at school. He had blue eyes and curly hair, and fought the captain on the very first day. On the second day his hair was still curly, but he had black eyes. On the third day he got into the cricket eleven, and on the fourth he was given his footer cap. Afterwards he sang in the choir, and won the competition for graceful diving. It was not until his second term that the headmaster really began to confide in him. By the way, is this the sort of thing you want?"

"Yes," smiled Dahlia. "Something like that."

"Well, then we went to Cambridge together. He never did much work, but his algebra paper in the Little Go was so brilliant that they offered him the Senior Wranglership. He refused on the ground that it might interfere with his training for the tug-of-war, for which he had just obtained his blue—and— It's a great strain making all this up. Do you mind if I stop now?"

"Of course I know that isn't all true, but he *is* like that, isn't he?"

"He is. He put me in first to-day."

"I know you really are fond of him."

"Lorblessyou—yes."

"That makes you my friend, too."

"Of course." I patted her hand. "That reminds me—as a friend I feel bound to warn you that there is a person about in the neighbourhood called Samuel Simpson who meditates an evil design upon you and yours. In short, a poem. In this he will liken you to the azalea, which I take to be a kind of shrubby plant."

"Yes?"

"Yes, well, all I want to say is, if he comes round with the hat afterwards, don't put anything in."

"Poor man," smiled Dahlia. "That's his living, isn't it?"

"Yes. That's why I say don't put anything in."

"I see. Oh, there—he's out. Poor Archie."

"Are you very sorry?" I said, smiling at her. "I'm just going, you know."

"Between ourselves," I said later to Myra, "that isn't at all a bad girl."

"Oh, fancy!"

"But I didn't come to talk about her—I came to talk about my seventeen."

"Yes, do let's."

"Yes. Er—you begin."

VII

"May I have a dance?" I asked Miss Blair.

She put her head on one side and considered.

"One, two, three—the next but *five*," she said.

"Thank you. That sounds a lot ; is it only one ?"

"You may have two running then, if you like."

"What about two running, and one hopping, and one really gliding ? Four altogether."

"We'll see," said Miss Blair gravely.

Myra, who was being very busy, came up and dragged me away.

"I want to introduce you to somebody. I say, have you seen Thomas ?"

"It's no earthly good introducing me to Thomas again."

"He's so important because he thinks the dance was his idea ; of course I'd meant to have it all along. There she is—her name's Dora Dalton. I think it's Dora."

"I shall call her Dora, anyhow."

I was introduced, and we had a very jolly waltz together. She danced delightfully ; and when we had found a comfortable corner she began to talk.

She said, "Do you play cricket ?"

I was rather surprised, but I kept quite cool, and said, "Yes."

"My brother's very fond of it. He is very good too. He was playing here yesterday against Mr. Mannering's team, and made six, and then the umpire gave him out ; but he wasn't out really, and he was very angry. I don't wonder, do you ?"

I had a sudden horrible suspicion.

"Did you say your name was Dora—I mean his name was Dalton ?"

"Yes. And just because he was angry, which anybody would be, the wicket-keeper was very rude, and told him to go home and—and bake his head."

"Not bake," I said gently, my suspicion having now become almost a certainty. "Boil."

"Go home, and boil his head," she repeated indignantly.

"And did he ?"

"Did he what ?"

"Er—did he understand—I mean, don't you think your brother may have misunderstood ? I can't believe that a wicket-keeper would ever demean himself by using the word 'boil.' Not as you might say *boil*. 'Cool his head' was probably the expression—it was a very hot day, I remember.

And . . . ah, there's the music beginning again. Shall we go back?"

I am afraid Miss Dalton's version of the incident was not quite accurate.

What had happened was this: I had stumped the fellow, when he was nearly a mile and a-half outside his crease; and when he got back to it some minutes later, and found the umpire's hand up, he was extremely indignant and dramatic about it. Quite to myself, *sotto voce* as it were, I murmured, "Oh, go home!" and I may have called attention in some way to the "bails." But as to passing any remarks about boiling heads—well, it simply never occurred to me.

I had a dance with Myra shortly after this. She had been so busy and important that I felt quite a stranger. I adapted my conversation accordingly.

"It's a very jolly floor, isn't it?" I said, as I brought her an ice.

"Oh yes!" said Myra in the same spirit.

"Have you been to many floors—I mean dances, lately?"

"Oh yes!"

"So have I. I think dances have been very late lately. I think when the floor's nice it doesn't matter about the ices. Don't you think the band is rather too elastic—I mean keeps very good time? I think so long as the time is good, it doesn't matter about the floor."

"Oh, *isn't* it?" said Myra enthusiastically.

There was a pleasant pause while we both thought of something else to say.

"Have you?" we began.

"I beg your pardon," we said at once.

"I was going to say," Myra went on, "have you read any nice books lately, or are you fonder of tennis?"

"I like reading nice books *about* tennis," I said. "If they *are* nice books, and are really about tennis. Er—do you live in London?"

"Yes. It is so handy for the theatres, isn't it? There is no place exactly like London, is there? I mean it's so different."

"Well, of course, up in Liverpool we do get the trams, you know, now. . . . I say, I'm tired of pretending I've only just met you. Let's talk properly."

At this moment we heard a voice say, "Let's try in here," and Archie and Dahlia appeared.

"Hallo ! here's the happy pair," said Myra.

They came in and looked at us diffidently. I leant back and gazed at the ceiling.

"Were you just going ?" said Archie.

"We were not," I said.

"Then we'll stay and talk to you."

"We were in the middle of an important conversation."

"Oh, don't mind us."

"Thank you. It's really for your benefit, so you'd better listen. Let me see, where were we ? Oh yes, 'One pound of beef, ninepence ; three pounds of potatoes, fourpence ; one piece of emery paper for the blanc-mange, tuppence ; one pound of india-rubber——' "

"*'Dahlia darling,'*" interrupted Myra, in a fair imitation of Archie's voice, "'how often have I told you that we *can't* afford india-rubber in the cake ? Just a few raisins and a cherry is really all you want. You *mustn't* be so extravagant.' "

"*'Dearest, I do try ; and after all, love, it wasn't I who fell into the cocoa last night.'* "

"*'I didn't fall in, I simply dropped my pipe in, and it was you insisted on pouring it away afterwards. And then, look at this—One yard of lace, 4s. 6d. That's for the cutlets, I suppose. For people in our circumstances paper frillings are quite sufficient.'* "

Archie and Dahlia listened to us with open mouths. Then they looked at each other, and then at us again.

"Is there any more ?" asked Archie.

"There's lots more, but we've forgotten it."

"You aren't ill or anything ?"

"We are both perfectly well."

"How's Miss Dalton ?"

"Dora," I said, "is also well. So is Miss Fortescue and so is Thomas. We are all well."

"I thought, perhaps——"

"No, there you are wrong."

"I expect it's just the heat and the excitement," said Dahlia, with a smile. "It takes some people like that."

"I'm afraid you miss our little parable," said Myra.

"We do. Come on, Dahlia."

"You'll pardon me, Archibald, but Miss Blair is dancing this with me."

Archie strongly objected, but I left him with Myra, and took Miss Blair away. We sat on the stairs and thought.

"It has been a lovely week," said Dahlia.

"It has," I agreed.

"Perhaps more lovely for me than for you."

"That's just where I don't agree with you. You know, we think it's greatly over-rated. Falling in love, I mean."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Myra and I. We've been talking it over. That's why we rather dwelt upon the sordid side of it just now. I suppose we didn't move you at all?"

"No," said Dahlia, "we're settled."

"That's exactly it," I said. "I should hate to be settled. It's so much more fun like this. Myra quite agrees with me."

Dahlia smiled to herself. "But perhaps some day," she began.

"I don't know. I never look more than a week ahead. 'It has been great fun this week, and it will probably be great fun next week.' That's my motto."

"Well, ye—es," said Miss Blair doubtfully.

VIII

"Do I know everybody?" I asked Myra towards the end of the dinner, looking round the table.

"I think so," said Myra. "If there's anybody you don't see in the window, ask for him."

"I can see most of them. Who's that tall handsome fellow grinning at me now?"

"Me," said Archie, smiling across at us.

"Go away," said Myra. "Gentlemen shouldn't eavesdrop. This is a perfectly private conversation."

"You've got a lady on each side of you," I said heatedly, "why don't you talk to *them*? It's simply scandalous that Myra and I can't get a moment to ourselves."

"They're both busy; they won't have anything to say to me."

"Then pull a cracker with yourself. Surely you can think of something, my lad."

"He has a very jealous disposition," said Myra, "and whenever Dahlia— Bother, he's not listening."

I looked round the table again to see if I could spy a stranger.

"There's a man over there—who's he? Where this orange is pointing."

"Oranges don't point. Waggle your knife round. Oh, him? Yes, he's a friend of Archie's—Mr. Derry."

"Who is he? Does he do anything exciting?"

"He does, rather. You know those little riddles in the Christmas crackers?"

"Yes?"

"Yes. Well, he couldn't very well do those, because he's an electrical engineer."

"But why——"

"No, I didn't. I simply asked you if you knew them. And he plays the piano beautifully, and he's rather a good actor, and he never gets up till about ten. Because his room is next to mine, and you can hear everything, and I can hear him not getting up."

"That doesn't sound much like an electrical engineer. You ask him suddenly what amperes are a penny, and see if he turns pale. I expect he makes up the riddles, after all. Simpson only does the mottoes, I know. Now talk to Thomas for a bit while I drink my orange."

Five minutes elapsed, or transpired (whichever it is), before I was ready to talk again. Generally, after an orange, I want to have a bath and go straight off to bed, but this particular one had not been so all-overish as usual.

"Now then," I said, as I examined the crystallized fruit, "I'm with you in one minute."

Myra turned round and looked absently at me.

"I don't know how to begin," she said to herself.

"The beginning's easy enough," I explained, as I took a dish of green sweets under my charge, "it's the knowing when to stop."

"Can you eat those and listen to something serious?"

"I'll try. . . . Yes, I can eat them all right. Now, let's see if I can listen. . . . Yes, I can listen all right."

"Then it's this. I've been putting it off as long as I

can, but you've got to be told to-night. It's—well—do you know why you're here?"

"Of course I do. Haven't I just been showing you?"

"Well, why are you here?"

"Well, frankly, because I'm hungry, I suppose. Of course, I know that if I hadn't been I should have come in to dinner just the same, but— Hang it, I mean that's the root idea of a dining-room, isn't it? And I *am* hungry. At least I was."

"Stave it off again with an almond," said Myra, pushing them along to me. "What I really meant was why you're here in the house."

This was much more difficult. I began to consider possible reasons.

"Because you all love me," I started; "because you put the wrong address on the envelope; because the regular boot-boy's ill; because you've never heard me sing in church; because—stop me when I'm getting warm—because Miss Fortescue refused to come unless I was invited; because——"

"Stop," said Myra. "That was it. And, of course, you know I didn't mean that at all."

"What an awful lot of things you don't mean to-night. Be brave, and have it right out this time."

"All right, then, I will. One, two, three—we're going to act a play on Saturday."

She leant forward and regarded me with apprehension.

"But why not? I'll promise to clap."

"You can't, because, you see, you're going to act too. Isn't it jolly?" said Myra breathlessly.

I gave what, if I hadn't just begun the last sweet, would have been a scornful laugh.

"Me act? Why, I've never—I don't do it—it isn't done—I don't act—not on Saturdays. How absurd!"

"Have you told him, Myra?" Dahlia called out suddenly.

"I'm telling him now. I think he's taking it all right."

"Don't talk about me as 'him'!" I said angrily. "And I'm *not* taking it all right. I'm not taking it at all."

"It's only such a very small part—we're all doing something, you know. And your costume's ordered and everything. But how awfully sporting of you."

After that, what could I say?

‘Er—what am I?’ I asked modestly.

‘You’re a—a small rat-catcher,’ said Myra cheerfully.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘A rat-catcher.’

‘You said a small one. Does that mean that I’m of diminutive size, or that I’m in a small way of business, or that my special line is young ones?’

‘It means that you haven’t much to say.’

‘I see. And would you call it a tragic or a pathetic part?’

‘It’s a comic part, rather. You’re Hereditary Rat-Catcher to the Emperor Bong. Bong the Second. Not the first Bong, the Dinner Bong.’

‘Look here. I suppose you know that I’ve never acted in my life, and never been or seen a rat-catcher in my life. It is therefore useless for you to tell me to be perfectly natural.’

‘You have so little to do; it will be quite easy. Your great scene is where you approach the Emperor very nervously——’

‘I shall do the nervous part all right.’

‘And beg him to spare the life of his mother-in-law.’

‘Why? I mean, who is she?’

‘Miss Fortescue.’

‘Yes, I doubt if I can make that bit seem quite so natural. Still, I’ll try.’

‘Hooray. How splendid!’

‘A rat-catcher,’ I murmured to myself. ‘Where is the rat? The rat is on the mat. The cat is on the rat. The bat is on the cat. The——’

‘Mr. Derry will go through your part with you to-morrow. Some of it is funnier than that.’

‘The electrical engineer? What do they know about rat-catching?’

‘Nothing, only——’

‘Aha! Now I see who your mysterious Mr. Derry is. He is going to coach us.’

‘He is. You’ve found it out at last. How bright green sweets make you.’

‘They have to be really bright green sweets. Poor man! What a job he’ll have with us all.’

‘Yes,’ said Myra, as she prepared to leave me. ‘Now you know why he doesn’t get up till ten.’

"In the rat-catching business," I said thoughtfully, as I opened the door, "the real rush comes in the afternoon. Rat-catchers, in consequence, never get up till ten-thirty. Do you know," I decided, "I am quite beginning to like my little part."

IX

I was, I confess, very late the next morning, even for a rat-catcher. Mr. Derry was in the middle of his breakfast; all the others had finished. We saluted, and I settled down to work.

"There is going to be a rehearsal at eleven o'clock, I believe," said Derry. "It must be nearly that now."

"I shall be there," I said, "if I have to bring the marmalade with me. You're going to coach us?"

"Well, I believe I said I would."

"Though I have never assumed the buskin myself," I went on, "I have, of course, heard of you as an amateur actor." (*Liar.*) "And if you could tell me how to act, while I am finishing my bacon, I should be most awfully obliged."

"Haven't you really done any?"

"Only once, when I was very small. I was the heroine. I had an offer, but I had to refuse it. I said, 'Alath, dear heart, I may not, I am married already.'"

"Very right and proper," murmured Derry.

"Well, as it turned out, I had made a mistake. It was my first who had been married already. The little play was full of surprises like."

Derry coughed, and took out his pipe. "Let me see," he began, "what's your part?"

"I am—er—a rodent-collector."

"Oh yes—the Emperor's rat-catcher."

"Grand hereditary," I said stiffly. "It had been in the family for years."

"Quite so."

I was about to enlarge upon the advantages of the hereditary principle when the door opened suddenly to admit Myra and Archie.

"You *don't* say you're down at last!" said Myra, in surprise.

"I hardly say anything at breakfast, as a rule," I pointed out.

"What an enormous one you're having. And only last night——"

"On the contrary, I'm eating practically nothing—a nut and one piece of parsley off the butter. The fact is, I glanced at my part before I went to bed, and there seemed such a lot of it I hardly slept at all."

"Why, you don't come on very much," said Archie. "Neither do I. I'm a conjuror. Can any gentleman here oblige me with a rabbit? . . . No, sir, I said a *rabbit*. Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you were coming up on to the stage. . . . Any gentleman——"

"Have some jam instead. What do you mean by saying I don't come on very much?" I took the book out of my pocket, and began to turn the leaves. "Here you are, nearly every page—'*Enter R.*, '*Exit R.*, '*Enter L.*'—I don't know who *he* is—'*Exeunt R.*, why, the rat-catcher's always doing *something*. Ah, here they're more explicit—'*Enter R. C.*' Hallo, that's funny, because I'd just— Oh, I see."

"One of our oldest and most experienced mimes," said Archie to Derry. "You must get him to talk to you."

"No secret of the boards is hid from him," added Myra.

"Tell us again, sir, about your early struggles," begged Archie.

"He means your early performances on the stage," explained Myra.

"There's one very jolly story about Ellen Terry and the fireproof curtain. Let me see, were you *Macbeth* then, or *Noise of Trumpets*? I always forget."

I drank my last cup of tea, and rose with dignity.

"It is a humorous family," I apologized to Derry. "Their grandfather was just the same. He *would* have his little joke about the first steam-engine."

Outside in the hall, there was a large crowd of unemployed, all talking at once. I caught the words "ridiculous" and "rehearsal," and the connection between the two seemed obvious and frequent. I singled out Thomas, abstracted his pouch, and began to fill up.

"What is all this acting business?" I asked. "Some idea about a little play, what? Let's toddle off, and have a game of billiards."

"They've let me in for a bally part," said Thomas, "and

you needn't think *you're* going to get out of it. They've got you down, all right."

"Thomas, I will be frank with you. I am no less a person than the Emperor Bong's Hereditary (it had been in the family for years) Grand Rat-catcher. The real rush, however, comes in the afternoon. My speciality is young ones."

"I'm his executioner."

"And he has a conjuror too. What a staff! Hallo, good morning, Simpson. Are you anything lofty?"

"'Oh, I am the Emperor Bong,'" said Simpson gaily; "I am beautiful, clever and strong——'"

"Question," said Thomas.

"'Tis my daily delight to carouse and to fight, and at moments I burst into song.'"

I looked at him in amazement.

"Well, just at present," I said, "all I want is a match. . . . A lucifer, Emp. A pine vesta, Maj. Thanks. . . . Now tell me—does anybody beside yourself burst into song during the play? Any bursting by Thomas or myself, for instance?"

"Nobody sings at all. My little poem is recitative."

"If you mean it's very bad, I agree with you," said Thomas.

"I made it up myself. It was thought that my part should be livened up a little."

"Well, why hasn't it been?"

"If you will give me two minutes, Simpson," I said, "I will liven up my own part better than that. What rhymes with rat-catcher?"

"Cat-catcher."

"Wait a bit. . . . Yes, that's got it:

'Oh, I'm on the Emperor's staff,
I'm a rodent-collector (don't laugh)—
My record (in braces)
Of rats and their races
Is a thousand and eight and a half.'"

"May we have that again?" said Myra, appearing suddenly.

"'Oh, I'm on——'"

"No," said Thomas.

"'Oh, I'm on——'"

"No," said Simpson.

"There is no real demand, I'm afraid."

"Well, I did just hear it before," said Myra. "I wish you'd make up one for me. I think we might all announce ourselves like that, and then the audience will have no difficulty in recognizing us."

"They'll recognize Thomas if he comes on with an axe. They won't think he's just trotted round with the milk. But what are you, Myra?"

"The Emperor's wife's maid."

"Another member of the highly trained staff. Well, go on, Simpson."

"'Oh, I am her Majesty's maid,'" declared Simpson. "We all begin with 'Oh,' to express surprise at finding ourselves on the stage at all. 'Oh, I am her Majesty's maid, I'm a sad little flirt, I'm afraid.'"

"I'm respectable, steady and staid," corrected Myra.

"No," I said; "I have it——"

'Oh, I am her Majesty's maid !
And her charms are beginning to fade,
I can sit in the sun
And look *just* twenty-one,
While *she's* thirty-six in the shade.' "

Myra made a graceful curtsy.

"Thank you, sir. You'll have to pay me a lot more of those before the play is over."

"Will I really?"

"Well, seeing as the Grand Hereditary One is supposed to be making up to her Majesty's confidential attendant——"

Miss Fortescue came pushing up to us.

"It is too ridiculous," she complained; "none of us know our parts yet, and if we have a rehearsal now—what do *you* think about it?"

I looked at Myra and smiled to myself. "I'm all for a rehearsal at once," I said.

X

"Now this is a very simple trick," said Archie from the centre of the stage. "For this little trick all I want is a hippopotamus and a couple of rubies. I take the hippopotamus in one hand—so—and cover it with the handkerchief. Then, having carefully peeled the rubies——"

Thomas put the last strip of silver paper on to his axe, and surveyed the result proudly.

"But how splendid!" said Myra as she hurried past. "Only you want some blood." And she jumped over the footlights and disappeared.

"Good idea. Archie, where do you keep the blood?"

"Hey, presto! it's gone. And now, sir, if you will feel in your waistcoat pockets you will find the hippopotamus in the right-hand side and the red ink in the left. No? Dear, dear, the hippopotamus must have been a bad one."

"Be an artist, Thomas," I said, "and open a vein or two. Do the thing properly, Beerbohm. But soft, a winsome maid, in sooth; I will approach her. I always forget that sooth bit. But soft, a win——"

"Why don't we begin?" asked Simpson; "I can't remember my part much longer. Oh, by the way, when you come up to me and say, 'Your Majesty e'en forgets the story of the bull's-eye and the revolving book-case——'"

"Go away; I don't say anything so silly."

"Oh, of course it's Blair. Blair, when you come up to me and say——" They retired to the back of the stage to arrange a very effective piece of business.

"Any card you like, madam, so long as it is in the pack. The Queen of Hearts? Certainly. Now I take the others and tear them up—so. The card remaining will be yours. Ah, as I thought—it is the Queen of Hearts."

"Archie, you're talking too much," said Dahlia, "and none of it comes into your part really."

"I'm getting the atmosphere. Have you an old top hat on you, dear, because if so we'll make a pudding. No top hat? Then pudding is horf."

"But stay, who is this approaching? Can it be—I say, mind the footlights. When are we going to begin?"

"There!" said Thomas proudly. "Anybody would know that was blood."

"But how perfectly lovely," said Myra. "Only you want some notches."

"What for?"

"To show where you executed the other men, of course. You always get a bit off your axe when you execute anybody."

"Yes, I've noticed that too," I agreed. "Notches, Thomas, notches."

"Why don't *you* do something for a change? What about the trap or whatever it is you catch your bally rats with? Why don't you make that?"

"It isn't done with a trap, Thomas dear. It's partly the power of the human eye and partly kindness. I sit upon a sunny bank and sing to them."

"Which is that?"

"If we don't begin soon," began Simpson——

"Hallo, Emperor, what's that you're saying? Quite so, I agree with you. I wonder if your High Fatness can lend me such a thing as a hard-boiled egg. Simpson, when this rehearsal is over—that is to say, to-morrow—I'll take you on at juggling; I'm the best——"

Derry finished his conversation with Miss Fortescue and turned to the stage.

"Now then, please, *please*," he said. "We'll just take the First Act. Scene, The Emperor's Palace. Enter Rat-catcher. You come on from the left."

I coughed and came on.

My part was not a long one, but it was a very important one. I was the connecting link between the different episodes of the play, and they wanted some connecting. Whenever anybody came on to the stage, I said (supposing I was there, and I generally was—the rat-catcher of those days corresponding to the modern plumber)—I said, "But who is this?" or "Hush, here comes somebody." In this way, the attention of the wakeful part of the audience was switched on to the new character, and continuity of action was preserved.

I coughed and came on.

"No," said Derry, "you must come on much more briskly."

"I can't. I've been bitten by a rat."

"It doesn't say so anywhere."

"Well, that's how I read the part. Hang it, I ought to know if I've been bitten or not. But I won't show it if you like ; I'll come on briskly."

I went out, and came on very briskly.

"That's better," said Derry.

"His Majesty ordered me to be here at the stroke of noon," I said. "'Belike he has some secret commands to lay upon me, or perchance it is naught but a plague of rats. But who is this ?'"

"'Oh,'" said Myra, coming in suddenly, "'I had thought to be alone.'"

"'Nay, do not flee from me, pretty one. It is thus that——' I say, Myra, it's no good my saying do not flee if you don't flee."

"I was just going to. You didn't give me a chance. There, now I'm fleeing."

"Oh, all right. 'It is thus that the rats flee when they see me approaching. Am I so very fearsome.'"

"'Orrid,'" said Archie to himself from the wings.

"One moment," said Derry, and he turned round to speak to somebody.

"Puffickly 'orrid,'" said Archie again.

"Nay, do not frown," Myra went on, "'tis only my little brother, who is like unto a codfish himself, and jealous withal."

"Ay, ay, and I thought it *was* a codfish. So that I had e'en brought the egg-sauce with me."

"Trouble not thyself for that," said Archie. "For verily the audience will supply thee with all the eggs thou wantest. I say, we *are* being funny."

"I'm not, I'm quite serious, I really did think it was a co— 'But tell me, fair one,'" I said hurriedly, "'for what dost the Emperor want me ?'"

"Yes, yes," said Derry, "I'm sorry I had to interrupt you. I think perhaps we had better begin again. Yes, from the beginning."

The rehearsal rolled on.

.

"I think it went splendidly," said Myra. "If only we had known our parts and come in at the right moments and been more serious over it."

"If there's any laughing to be done it will have to be done by *us*. The audience won't laugh."

"Mr. Derry having explained that the author was not in the house, the audience collected their cauliflowers and left quietly.' I think it's a rotten play."

"Well, it isn't frightfully funny," said Myra, "but we can put that in ourselves."

"It's so jolly hard to say the lines properly—they're so unnatural," complained Thomas. 'Truly thou hast created a favourable impression with the damsel,'—well, I mean, it's absurd. Any ordinary person would say 'Truly thou art amongst them, old sport,' or something of that kind."

"Well, you say, Thomas; you'll be all right."

"We might put a few songs in," said Dahlia, "and a dance or two."

"I think you've forgotten that we've done only Act I," remarked Archie. "His Majesty's conjuror doesn't really let himself go till Act II. Still, I'm all for a song and a dance. Simpson, come and Apache with me."

They dashed at each other fiercely.

"Oh, *we'll* make it go all right," said Myra.

XI

"Has anybody here seen Kelly?" asked Dahlia, putting her head in at the billiard-room door. "I mean Archie."

"I'm waiting here for Kate," I said. "I mean Myra."

"Oughtn't you to be dressing? It doesn't matter about me—I'm not on for a long time."

"A rat-catcher's best suit is not an elaborate one; I can put it on in about five minutes. It is now seven-thirty, we begin at eight-thirty—hence the billiard cue. More chalk."

"Oh, *why* aren't you nervous? How you can stand calmly there——"

"I *am* nervous. Look." I aimed carefully and put the red into a pocket some miles away. "There you are. Have you ever seen me do that in real life? Of course not. If my hand had been steady, I should have been a foot to the right. Still more chalk."

"Well, I want Archie, and I shall cry if I don't find him. That's how I feel." She sat down and got up again.

"My dear Dahlia," I said solemnly, "now you can understand a father's feelings—I mean, now, you see what you women have brought on yourselves. Who suggested a play? The women. Who dragged me into it? The women. Who said rat-catchers always wore whiskers? The women. Who is designing me a pair of whiskers at this moment? The wom—Simpson. Who but for whom (this is going to be a very difficult sentence) who but for whom, would be just thinking of dressing leisurely for dinner, instead of which we had a hasty snack, and have now got to put on heaven knows what? The women. Well, it serves you right."

"Don't be horrid. I want Archie." She got up for the third time and drifted out of the room.

I chalked my cue and went into a pocket without touching anything. When I say I went in I mean that the ball I was playing with went in. You do see that? Very well, then. I took it out and began to squint along my cue again, when two hands came suddenly over my eyes and a voice said: "Guess who it is."

"The Queen of Sheba," I tried.

"Right," said Myra.

I turned and looked at her.

"Golly, you do, you really do!" I said at last. "Did they always dress like that in the Bong era? Short skirts, long pigtail, bare arms,—lovely!"

"I can sit in the sun and look just twenty-one," sang Myra as she dropped into the sofa.

"Well, just at present you're sitting in the billiard-room and looking about fifteen. . . . How are you getting on with your French this term? I had a very bad report in the holidays from your governess. The extra ninepence a week seems to have been simply thrown away."

"Aren't you excited?" said Myra, looking at me with sparkling eyes.

"As for calisthenics, well, what I say is, My daughter is Church of England, and if you don't like it, she can come away. I'm not going to have her stuffed up with all that nonsense."

Myra jumped up. "Aren't you excited?" she insisted.

"Feel my tongue—I mean my pulse, it's quite normal. And why? Because I've forgotten my part, and I'm going to bed."

"It's a great responsibility our beginning the play."

"It is. Have you ever thought that, if we refused to begin, the play couldn't continue, and then the audience would be able to go home? My idea was to tackle the people as they arrive, and come to terms with them. I'm sure there's money in it."

"You aren't bothering, are you?"

"Of course I am. I'd give a hundred pounds to be out of it. No, I wouldn't—I'd give a hundred pounds if you'd always wear that frock and do your hair like that. Will you? And you shall go on with your French, child."

Myra curtsied prettily.

"And I'll go on with my whiskers. You haven't seen me in those yet, have you?" There was a loud noise without. "Here they are, coming in."

It was not the whiskers, however, but Archie and Thomas in full costume; Archie in green and Thomas in black.

"Hallo," said Archie, "I feel just like a conjuror."

"You look just like a grasshopper," said Thomas.

"My dear friend," said Archie, patting him kindly on his shoulder, "is that you? But you oughtn't to be here, you know. You came up the hot-water pipe, I suppose? Yes, yes, but they misdirected you—the blackbeetle department is in the basement. Well, well, it will be easier going down."

"Archie, Dahlia's looking for you."

"It's all right, she found me. She was nearly in tears. She said, 'Is that my Archibald or an onion?' I said, 'Fear not, fair one, 'tis but the early crocus.' Myra, don't you think they've overdone the green rather? To be quite frank, I don't see why a conjuror should be dressed in green at all."

"To distinguish him from the rat-catcher in brown, the executioner in black, and the Master of the Gold Fish in red."

"I had thought that perhaps a certain aptitude for legerdemain might so distinguish him. But I perceive that I am wrong. Hallo, why aren't you in brown, then?"

"I am coming on like this," I explained. "I was going

to have changed, but now I've seen you two, I don't think I will. With my ordinary clothes, one whisker—probably the starboard one—and a little insouciance, I shall be a great success."

"What annoys me," said Thomas, "is that in the early Bong age they had no bally pockets. I've simply got nowhere to keep a handkerchief."

"Keep it behind the scenes; and then, if you blow your nose immediately before the execution, and again immediately after it, you ought to be all right."

"It isn't for that. It's in case I want to cry."

"It's all right for me," said Archie. "I've simply got to say, 'Now can anybody in the audience oblige me with a handkerchief?' and I shall get dozens."

"Then I shall probably touch you for one. Great Irvings! is this really Simpson?"

The Emperor Bong was making a splendid entry, looking (except for his spectacles) exactly like an emperor.

"Rise, rise," he said. "Stop grovelling. Oh, look here, you fellows, when I say 'On the stomach!' then you must—Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Mannerling, I didn't see you were there."

"Where are my whiskers?" I asked sternly.

"My dear old chap, I couldn't do them; there wasn't enough to go round. I made two nice little eyebrows instead—you'll find them on your dressing-table. 'Oh, I am the Emperor Bong, I am beautiful, clever and strong. I am beauti—" Do you think I ought to wear my spectacles or not?"

There was a loud shout of "No!"

"Oh, all right. But I shall probably fall over the sunset or something. Thomas, if you see me wandering into a new moon, tap me on the head with your axe. Why isn't my rat-catcher dressed?"

"He was waiting for his whiskers."

"That's perfectly absurd. You could have grown a pair in the time. Go and dress at once."

"I refuse to do anything till a quarter-past eight," I said. "If I get into my things now, all the atmosphere will have worn off by the time we begin."

"It's worn off me a long time ago," said Thomas dismally.

"And me," said Myra, with a shiver.

"Well, we're all very miserable," said Archie; "let's have a bottle of something. What? Oh, hush! Simpson, just ring the bell, and I'll show you a little conjuring trick. There's nothing on the table at present, is there? No. Well, now, you watch."

XII

The play was a great success; I know, because many of the audience told me so afterwards. Had they but guessed what was going on behind the scenes, the congratulations would have been even more enthusiastic. For as near as a touch we had to drop the eggproof curtain and hand the money back.

I am going to give you the opening scene as it was actually said—not as it was heard across the footlights—and then you will understand. As you may remember, the *Rat-catcher* (Me) and the *Maid* (Myra) take the stage first, and they introduce themselves in the usual way to the audience and each other. The scene is the palace of the *Emperor Bong* (Simpson). Very well then.

Maid (sweetly). Truly his Majesty is a handsome man, and I wonder not that his people love him.

Rat-catcher (rather nervous). Thou surprisest me. I saw him in the wings—in the winter garden just now—that is to say, anon—and thought him plain. But hush, here he comes.

(They salaam, or whatever you call it, and stay there.)

Rat-catcher (still salaaming). What's the silly ass waiting for? I can't stick this much longer; the blood's all going to my head like anything.

Maid (in a similar position). He must have forgotten his cue. Can't you say, "Hush, here he comes," again?

Rat-catcher. I can't say anything out loud in this position. Do you think I might come up for a breath?

Maid (loudly). His Majesty tarries.

Rat-catcher (sotto voce). He does. You've got it.

Maid. Whatever shall we do? Do think of something.

Rat-catcher. Well, I'm going to rise to the surface. I'm tired of being a submarine. *(They both stand up.)*

Maid (brilliantly). Perchance it was a rat we heard and not his Majesty.

Rat-catcher (with equal brilliance). Fear not, fair damsel. Behold, I will investigate. (*Proceeds to back of stage.*)

Archie (from wings). Come off, you idiot.

Rat-catcher (always the gentleman—to Maid). Tarry a while, my heart, what time I seek assistance. (*Exit.*)

Maid (confidentially to audience—to keep the thing going). Truly he is a noble youth, though he follows a lowly profession. 'Tis not the apparel that proclaims the man. Methinks. . . .

Me (annoyed). Who's an idiot?

Archie. Didn't you see me wink? That ass Simpson's banged his nose against a door-post and is bleeding like a pig. Says it's because he hadn't got his spectacles.

Me (still annoyed). More likely the champagne.

Archie. They're dropping keys down his back as hard as they can. Will you and Myra gag a bit, till he's ready?

Me (excitedly). My good fool, how on earth——

Myra (coming to back of stage). But behold he returns. (*Frowns imperiously.*)

Rat-catcher (coming on again very unwillingly). Ah, fair maid, 'tis thee. I bring thee good tidings. I met one in the ante-room, a long-legged, scurvy fellow, who did tell me that his Majesty was delayed on some business.

Maid. That must have been his Conjuror—I know him well. (*Aside.*) What's happened?

Rat-catcher. Let us then rest a while, an it please thee. (*Seizing her by the arm.*) Over here. That ass Simpson's hurt himself. We've got to amuse the audience till he's finished bleeding.

Maid (sitting down with her back to audience). I say, is it really serious?

Rat-catcher. Not for him; it is for us. Now then, talk away.

Maid. Er—h'm. (*Coyly.*) Wilt not tell me of thy early life, noble sir, how thou didst become a catcher of rats?

Rat-catcher (disgusted). You coward! (*Aloud.*) Nay, rather let me hear of thine own life. (*Aside.*) Scored.

Maid. That's not fair. I asked you first. (*Modestly.*) But I am such a little thing, and you are so noble a youth.

Rat-catcher. True. (*Having a dash at it.*) 'Twas thus.

My father, when I was yet a child, didst—did—no, didst—apprentice me to a salad binger——

Maid (with interest). How dost one bing salads?

Rat-catcher (curtly). Ballad singer. And I would frequent the market place at noon, singing catches and glees, and receiving from the entranced populace divers coins, curses, bricks and other ornaments. One morn, as I was embarked upon a lovely ballad, "*Place me amidst the young gazelles,*" I was seized right suddenly from behind. (*Bored to death.*) I'm sick of this. We're supposed to be amusing the audience.

Maid. Oh, go on. I'm getting awfully amused.

Emperor (audibly from green-room). Confound it, it's begun again.

Executioner (bitterly). And to think that I spent *hours* putting red ink on my axe!

Maid (with great presence of mind). What's that? Surely *that* was a rat.

Rat-catcher (greatly relieved). It was. (*Getting up.*) Let's have Archie on, and see if he can amuse them a bit more. (*Aloud.*) I must finish my tale anon. Stay here, sweet child, what time I fetch my trusty terrier. (*Exit.*)

Maid. 'Tis a strange story he tells. How different from my own simple life. Born of proud but morbid parents. . . .

Archie. What's up? Stick to it.

Me. Have you got such a thing as a trusty terrier on you?

Archie (feeling up his sleeve). No.

Me. Well, the audience will be extremely disappointed if I don't bring one back. I practically promised them I would. Look here, why don't you come on and help? Everybody is getting horribly bored with us.

Archie (delightedly). Oh, all right.

Enter Rat-catcher and Conjuror.

Maid. But behold, he returns *again*!

Rat-catcher (excitedly). Great news, fair lady, which this long-legged, scurvy fellow I told you of will impart to us.

Maid. Why, 'tis the Conjuror. Have you news for us, sir?

Conjuror (with no illusions about the Oriental style). Absolutely

stop press. What is it you want to know? Racing? The Bong Selling Plate was won by Proboscis, McSimp up. Immense enthusiasm. Bank rate unchanged—quite right this cold weather. Excuse me a moment, sir, your moustache is coming off. No, the left wing—allow me to lend you a postage stamp. Do you prefer red or green?

Maid (biting her lip). Will you not give us news of the Emperor?

Conjurer. I will. His Majesty has met with a severe accident whilst out hunting this morning, being bitten by a buffalo.

Maid. Alas, what will my mistress say?

Conjurer. She has already said everything that was necessary. Her actual words were: "Just like Bong."

Rat-catcher (seizing the opportunity). His Majesty ordered me to meet him here at noon. Methinks I had better withdraw and return anon. *(Makes off hurriedly.)*

Conjurer (seizing him). Not so. He bade me command you to stay and sing to us. *(Sensation.)*

Rat-catcher (huskily). Alas, I have forgotten my voice—that is, I have left my music at home. I will go and fetch it. *(Has another dash.)*

Conjurer. Stay! Listen! *(They all listen.)*

Simpson (in wings). Thanks, thanks, that will be all right now. Oh no, quite, thanks. Oh, is this your key? Thanks, thanks. No, it doesn't matter about the other ones, they don't feel at all uncomfortable, thanks. Yes, I think it really did stop it, thanks.

Conjurer. I'm off! *(Aloud.)* His Majesty has regained consciousness. *(Exit.)*

Simpson (apologetically). Oh, Archie, I've got the billiard-room key in my——

Rat-catcher (very loudly to Maid). Hush, here he comes! *(They salaam.)*

(Enter the Emperor Bong.)

XIII

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Simpson at the supper-table, glass in hand, "it is my pleasant duty——"

"Bother!" murmured Myra. "Drinking healths always makes me feel funny."

"Silence for McSimp," shouted Archie. "Now then, pass along there, please. There's no need to push, you'll all be able to hear. Gentleman, the O'Sumph is addressing us impromptu, not to say unasked."

"It is my pleasant duty," continued Simpson, "as your late Emperor (*Half-an-hour-late. How's the probosc?*), to propose the health of the Rabbits Dramatic Company. (*Hooray!*) Great as we are on the cricket-field (*Wide!*)—great, I say, as we are on the cricket-field (*Pitch 'em up, Simpson*), we are, I think, still greater in the halls of Thespis. (*Don't know the lady.*) Gentlemen, I knew Irving. (*Liar!*) I have heard tell of Garrick (*Good! Ever heard of Shakespeare?*), but to-night has been a new experience for me. (*I will—give you—the kee—eys of—.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I propose our very good healths, coupled with the name of our hostess Miss Mannering." (*Loud cheers.*)

"That's me," said Myra.

"I single out Miss Mannering," added Simpson, "because I'm sure we should all like to hear her make a speech."

"Oh, Samuel," said Myra, shaking her head at him, "and I thought it was because you loved me."

"The Rabbits! Myra!" we cried.

"Miss Mannering will now address you," announced Archie. "She will be glad to answer any questions afterwards; but any one who interrupts will be hurled out. I appeal to you, as Englishmen, to give her a fair hearing."

Myra stood on a chair, looking lovely, but very lonely, and waited till we were silent.

"My dear good friends," she began, and then she caught Thomas's eye. "Hallo, Tommy," she said wistfully. . . . "My dear good friends, but why should you say *I'm* a jolly good fellow, when it isn't my birthday or anything? But how *silly* of you! Why, of course, we're *all* jolly good fellows—and jolly good actors too. It *has* been fun, hasn't it? . . . Oh, Archie, dear. . . . I hope we shall all be here in the summer, don't you? Well, you can't very well say you don't, now I've asked you, can you? You'll have to pretend your uncles are very ill, and then you needn't come. . . . Oh, *please—don't* look at me like that, make me want to cry, and I only want to laugh to-night. . . . Archie, may I get down?"

"She *is* a dear," Dahlia whispered to me. "How you can go on——"

It was Simpson who saved the situation and made us merry and bright again. He hastily trotted out the suggestion that we should tour the country in the summer, playing cricket in the day and *Bong the Second* at night. Archie backed him up at once.

"Only I'm off Bong Two altogether," he said. "Of course, what we want is a cricket play. We shall have to write one ourselves, I expect; there aren't any really good ones about. Act I, Rupert Vavasour, a dashing bat and the last descendant of an ancient but impoverished house, is in love with the beautiful but equally impoverished Millicent. Milly is being pursued by a rich villain of the name of Jasper Fordyce, the said Jasper being a bowler of extreme swiftness, with a qualification for Essex. . . . Go on, Simpson."

"In order to restore the fallen fortunes of the house, Rupert plays for Kent as a professional—Binks (R.)—and secures talent money in six successive matches. Jasper hears of it, and (Act II) assassinated the scorer, bribing a hireling of his own to take the deceased's place. In the next match Rupert only scores forty-nine."

"Rupert," continued Thomas, "who had been counting his own jolly score, and made it eighty-seven, was furious, and determined at all costs to foil the villain. Accordingly he went on to bowl in the next innings and took five wickets for two hundred and thirty-nine, thus obtaining talent money."

"A little love interest, please, Dahlia," said Archie.

"Now the captain, who was in the secret," said Dahlia, "was in love with Rupert's sister, which was why he put Binks (R.) on to bowl. As soon as Binks had collected his five wickets, Blythe went on, and took the other five for three runs. In this way Kent just managed to win, and so Rupert got more talent money."

"The next match was against Essex—Act III the great act of the play—and Jasper Fordyce was playing for the Leyton brigade. As he put on his spurs before taking the field, and brushed his sleek black hair, he smiled sardonically to himself. Had he not overnight dug holes in the pitch at the pavilion end, and was not the wicket fiery, and he notoriously an erratic bowler?"

"Everything points to Simpson playing Jasper," I said, and continued :

" 'Heads,' cried Jasper. It was heads. 'I put you in,' he remarked calmly. 'What!' said the other in amazement. Ten minutes later Binks (R.) and Humphreys were at the wicket. Binks took first ball with a touch of nervousness at his heart. All depended on this match. If only he could make four hundred and fifty to-day, he would be able to pay off the mortgage and marry his Millicent. . . . 'Play.' Jasper rushed up to the wicket and delivered the ball. Then before anybody could see how it happened, Rupert was stretched full-length upon the sward!"

"I had rather thought of playing Rupert myself," said Archie. "But I'm not so sure now."

"Five for two hundred and thirty-nine," I reminded him. "The part was written for you."

"But what of Millicent?" said Myra. "Fearing lest some evil should overtake her lover she had attended the match clad in a long ulster, and now she flung this off, revealing the fact that she was in flannels. With her hair tucked up beneath her county cap she looked a slim and handsome boy. To rush on to the field and take the injured one's place was the work of a moment. 'Who is this?' said the umpires in amazement. 'Fear not,' whispered Millicent to Humphreys, 'I have a birth qualification for the county, and the gardener coached me for an hour last night.'"

"Once more Jasper rushed up to the crease, and the spectators held their breath."

" 'I'm going to be a spectator,' I said, 'with a breath-holding part. Sorry—go on, Blair.'"

"Then Millicent's bat flashed, and, behold! the ball was on the boundary! A torrent of cheers rent the air. Again he bowled, again the bat flashed. Jasper ground his teeth."

"The curtain goes down here to represent the passing of an hour. When it rises again, Millicent's score is four hundred and twenty-three. There was dead silence for a moment. Then Millicent swung her bat. And at that the cheers broke out, such cheering as had never been heard before. Mac-laren's record score was beaten at last! 'Now surely he will knock his wickets down,' said the spectators. Little did they know that until four hundred and fifty was upon the tins the mortgage could not be paid off! Four hundred

and thirty—four hundred and forty—four hundred and forty-nine—a sharply run single—four hundred and fifty! From the pavilion Rupert heard the cheers and fainted again.

“It was ‘over,’ and Millicent had the bowling. Jasper delivered the ball, a fast half-volley——”

(“Oh, Simpson simply *must* play Jasper.”)

“—and Millicent drove it back hard and true. Jasper tried to duck, but it was too late. He was dead.

“Act IV. All his money went to Rupert, who was a distant cousin. He married Millicent, and they lived happily ever after. But, though they are always to be seen at the Tonbridge and Canterbury weeks, they have never played cricket again. *Curtain.*”

“And bedtime,” said Myra suddenly. “Good night, everybody.”

TREAD ON IT



LOUIS GOLDING

LOUIS GOLDING, novelist, essayist, and lecturer, spends most of his time tramping along the remoter shores of the Mediterranean, and seems able to write brilliantly under conditions of discomfort that few authors would endure. Of his many novels *Magnolia Street*, a powerful study of Jewish life, is the most remarkable.

TREAD ON IT

HETTIE TEMPLETON and Frank Stamper were engaged to be married. The marriage was fixed for a year come next April, which meant not too long and not too short an engagement. It would give Hettie time to get her bottom drawer ready and Frank time to put a decent penny away towards buying a small modern home and the furniture that goes with it. They didn't believe in doing things either too slowly or too soon in the small town of Weaving, in Oxfordshire. The town of Weaving was neither too small nor too large. In fact, everything was just comfortable in Weaving in general, and in the affairs of Frank and Hettie in particular. So they were going to be married a year come next April.

And then Claude Pettifer appeared on the scene. That was in February. Three months later, in May, the engagement between Frank Stamper and Hettie Templeton was broken off. A month after that, in June, it was announced that a marriage would take place between Claude Pettifer and Hettie Templeton. Claude and Hettie wanted it to take place in four weeks. Hettie's mother managed to persuade them to wait for four months. That was quite quick enough work for the small town of Weaving in Oxfordshire.

And this is how it happened. It first must be stated quite bluntly that Hettie Templeton was not a flibbertigibbet, a fly-by-night, as you might call it. She was a nice steady girl who worked at Tomkins's, the milliner, and would have stood a good chance of becoming a manageress, too, if she hadn't made up her mind to go in for marriage as a career instead, now with one young man, now with another. Frank Stamper was a nice steady chap, too. Perhaps, on the whole, he was just a little too nice and steady. He was a leading light in the local Rationalist Society and went in for wrought iron as a hobby. By profession he was a bank clerk. In fact, during the evolution of the events which are about to be described,

he became head cashier. That appointment did not itself modify the course of events, but does at least show that it was not because he was an unstable young man, with anything but the most rosy prospects before him, that Hettie Templeton broke off her engagement with him and announced her determination to marry Claude Pettifer.

No, the reason for that was neither Frank Stamper nor Hettie Templeton. It was Claude Pettifer himself, nothing but Claude Pettifer, his liquid brown eyes, his curly brown hair, his beautiful brown hands, his exquisite finger-nails.

Claude Pettifer was no yokel from Weaving. And for that matter, neither was Frank Stamper either. His father had been an insurance canvasser and his mother the daughter of a lay preacher. His antecedents were unimpeachable on both sides.

But the fact is Claude Pettifer made every native in the place look completely bucolic, he had such a cultured voice and such polished manners. Claude came from the suburb of Chiswick in the West of London, a region with lots of artistic people in it, as well as lots of the best London families. He was a photographer. He had what he called an *atelier* on the Chiswick High Road. But he didn't feel that he got his chance there, in Chiswick. There were too many competitors there, who did a very second-rate line of business, from passports to enlargements. That wasn't what he was after at all. He liked taking photographs of people at odd angles, in funny chalky lights and pitchy blacknesses. Or he would just photograph people's shoulder-blades made all shiny with vaseline, or the tips of their fingers holding eggs delicately balanced on plain wooden bones. He was really more an artist than a mere photographer, and he should have had an *atelier* in Berkeley Square, or in Sloane Street, at least, rather than in Chiswick High Road.

That was his ambition, of course. But he hadn't the money to gratify it for the time being. So he looked round for a small provincial town which was not so go-ahead that it was already stocked up with modernist photographers, nor, so to speak, so stick-in-the-mud that it would laugh a modernist photographer out of the town. And that was how he hit upon Weaving, in Oxfordshire, a town which is neither too *outré* nor too old-world. And that was how he came to meet Frank Stamper and Hettie Templeton. With the one he

became very friendly, for Frank was intelligent and sympathetic, and really had an idea what Claude was about with his angles and shadows and eggs balanced on bones. With the other he fell in love, for Hettie was a good-looking girl, quite one of the best-looking girls in the place, and she had the sort of shoulder-blades which, when rubbed over with vaseline, photographed extremely well. Really, a girl like Hettie was wasted on a place like Weaving. She was more than good enough to preside over an *atelier* flat in Sloane Street, or even in Berkeley Square for that matter. You could do quite a lot with her shoulder-blades besides photograph them.

And in the course of a couple of months he not only convinced Hettie Templeton that it would be a crying shame if she buried herself in Weaving for the rest of her life, but he managed to convince Frank Stamper too. Frank was not only a rationalist, he was rational, as well; and when Claude put the case to him with a lucidity and a cogency which would have won over a superstitious peasant, he could bring up no counter-arguments against his friend's case.

Of course, Claude made no bones about it. He admitted he was in love with Hettie. He wanted to marry her for his own sake just as much as for Hettie's. But taking it by and large, seeing that they both loved Hettie, what was the right thing for Hettie to do? There was clearly only one answer to the question.

So Hettie announced that her engagement to Frank was broken off. A month later Hettie announced her engagement to Claude. And then a month or so later, a certain Schevering, a visitor from the Hague, in Holland, appeared on the scene, and he had quite a lot to do with the subsequent histories of Hettie Templeton and her two young men.

Schevering was too grand a person to have a first name or be called "Monsieur" or "Herr" or anything. He was just "Schevering, Telepaath". He always used the Dutch word with simple dignity to describe who he was and what he did, as a Henry Tudor might say of himself, he was "Henry, King". He was tall and lean and sallow and looked a little like Savonarola the Florentine. He was making a round of the smaller suburban and provincial music-halls, until such time as the stellar music-halls of London, Paris, and New York recognized his powers. Until which time this extraordinary man had to content himself with appearing on the same bills as comic

cyclists in bloomers, simpering sopranos, and performing seals.

Schevering was a "Telepaath", a thought-reader. He got up on the stage with the air of a Jeremiah lamenting, and his manager announced that any member of the audience could make any mental request whatsoever from Schevering, and he would fulfil it, so long as it was within the bounds of propriety and the physical possibilities of the hall. Members could come up from their seats or stay in their seats; they could confide their requests to their friends or the manager, or they could keep them entirely to themselves. The only thing that was stipulated was this: in the act of conveying their requests across the ether to the sensitive reception-plate of Schevering's mind, the public must split up their requests, however complicated, into their elements—to render them in a strict time-series. It was not enough to will Schevering to come up to you where you sat and request him to take the tram-ticket out of your left-hand upper waistcoat pocket and light a cigarette with it taken out of the case in the trouser-pocket of the gentleman sitting two seats away. You had first to will him to take the tram-ticket out of your left-hand upper waistcoat pocket. Then, that safely achieved, you had to will him to turn his attention to the gentleman two seats away. Then he had to take the cigarette-case out of his trouser pocket. Then remove the cigarette. And so on and so on from stage to stage till the culminating act of clairpercipience was achieved.

And the fact was that success invariably crowned Schevering's experiments if his one proviso was respected. And success was invariably greeted with a roar of acclamation which was only equalled by the storm of booing which accompanied it. For Weaving was split from top to bottom by the Schevering question. Half Weaving was convinced of the genuineness of Schevering's powers, even though there was considerable discussion among the believers as to their actual nature. The other half was convinced that the experiments were carried on through the agency of some ingenious code, and when they booed Schevering night after night in the theatre, it was not because the experiments did not come off, for they patently *did* come off, but because they resented the foreigner's insolence in attempting to hoodwink a body of decent straightforward Englishmen.

It is not to be wondered at that Frank Stamper was the

leader of the faction that repudiated Schevering and all his works. He did not join in the booing himself, but he gave the booers their principal arguments. Frank Stamper did not accept the possibility of extra-human powers. He did not believe in them when Buddhas or Mohammeds claimed them and made religions out of them, and he did not accept them when cheap-jack foreigners claimed them and made money out of them.

The leader of the opposite faction was Claude Pettifer, and that was not to be wondered at either. In a sense he was as modernist as anyone in Weaving, or in Bloomsbury, for that matter, as witness his balanced eggs, his greased shoulder-blades, the chromium-plate fittings in his shop-window. But he was a mystic, too; he had read popular summaries of the works of Eddington and Jeans, and he was convinced matter wasn't everything. Some of his supporters said it wasn't necessary to go any further than Schevering himself went—namely, to admit the proven validity of telepathic powers and Schevering's possession of them. But that wasn't enough for Claude. He maintained that Schevering was a scientific mystic; he existed on more than one time-plane simultaneously; he was, in fact, in tune with the infinite.

Feeling ran high in Weaving and the two factions came to blows once or twice in the theatre itself, as well as in the public-house. But the two leaders, Claude Pettifer and Frank Stamper, treated each other with the most scrupulous politeness. You might even say, so far as Claude was concerned, he treated Frank not only with politeness but with heartiness. After all, Frank had behaved like a white man in the matter of Hettie Templeton. Claude was thoroughly grateful to him.

Frank himself did not feel so amiable about the affair. In fact, as the weeks went on, he began to feel more and more furious. He wasn't at all certain that people weren't beginning to say of him that he was, in their blunt way of putting it, "a mug". There were occasions when Claude talked to him so smoothly with that cultured voice, and rolled his brown liquid eyes at him so winningly, that it was all he could do not to smash Claude's face in there and then. He did not do so, however, not merely because Claude was several inches bigger than he was, but because he thought that was no way for a rationalist to behave.

No, Claude and Frank were on the best of terms, so far

as anyone could judge. So much so, that on a certain Saturday morning, Claude sent Frank round a nice present. You could almost say of it, it was really a big-minded present. It was a photograph of Claude himself, with Hettie at his side. In setting and conception it was a return to earlier photographic traditions. The furniture in the background consisted of an Italian temple, a console-table, and an aspidistra on a bamboo table. The picture itself depicted Hettie with one hand on Claude's further shoulder and Claude with one hand on Hettie's. Their shoulders faced the camera but their heads were turned. They were looking into each other's eyes like a pair of courting lovers who had gone up to Blackpool for the day.

Claude was so pleased with the picture, slightly reactionary though it was, that he not only sent a copy to Frank, but he put up another copy in the very centre of his shop-window. It was obviously much more to the taste of the Weaving people than all those eggs and cogwheels and knee-caps, for it attracted a great deal of attention. As the day went on, the crowd got bigger and bigger. When Frank went by on his way home from the bank, he did not need to ask why that big crowd was gathered in front of Claude Pettifer's shop-window. He knew. He blushed to the roots of his hair, and crept round a corner like a pickpocket who is not at all certain that someone hasn't seen him filch a watch from somebody's waistcoat.

The narrow passage he had crept into led him round by the back of the Weaving Hippodrome. There was a big bill pasted up on a space of wall beside the stage-door. The bill was a picture of "Schevering, Telepaath", in a tail-suit. The eyes were piercing, the brow was lofty. A smaller bill was pasted obliquely across Schevering's legs. "Last Performance To-night", said the bill.

"Last Performance To-night?" murmured Frank to himself, out of the depths of his musing. "Last Performance To-night? Oh, Mr. Dirty Pettifer, there may be a chance of getting my own back, after all. I may make a fool of myself, Mr. Stinking Pettifer, but not half such a fool as I'll make you. Do what you can, Schevering, do all you can!"

Frank Stamper managed to get a seat in the front row of the stalls that night, for Schevering's last performance. It was a distinguished place, but only half as distinguished as Claude Pettifer's. Claude had a box, the bottom stage-box

on the right-hand side. He had Hettie Templeton beside him. They looked very smart in their evening-dress and a large box of chocolates on the ledge in front of them. He caught sight of Frank in his stall. "Hello, Frank. Is that you?" he called out over the intervening heads, as if he had for a moment thought that Frank might be President Roosevelt.

"Yes," said Frank between his teeth. "It's me right enough!"

"Oh, that's odd!" cried Claude. "I thought you'd had enough on Monday!"

"Yes, Frank," exclaimed Claude's supporters. "Have you come round?"

"I thought I'd give him another chance," said Frank.

The comedians and the acrobats got through their turns somehow. Nobody in Weaving that week was interested in comedians or acrobats. At last the turn of "Schevering, Telepaath", came round. He was greeted with the accustomed uproar of cheers and boos. He looked more like Savonarola than ever. The manager made his usual little speech. Three or four experiments were carried out with the usual success.

"Any other lady or gentleman, please?" asked the manager, wiping his hands. A little globule of sweat ran down each cheek. "How about it, ladies and gentlemen?"

"Yes, if you don't mind," a voice came a little fearfully, a little shrilly, from a seat in the front row of the stalls. "I'd like to have a try, please."

"By all means!" said the manager. "Would you like to come up on the stage? Or would you like Schevering to come down to you?"

"I'd like him to come down to me, thank you," replied Frank Stamper. He seemed to have taken command of himself again. There was a note of grim resolution in his voice not habitual in it.

Schevering stepped over the footlights and down into the stalls. As he descended his coat-tails flapped up behind and around him like the wings of a vulture. He looked not unlike a bird of prey with that blue jowl and great beak. His manager led him by the hand and stationed him in front of Frank Stamper. The whole house was as hushed as a cathedral. They were aware of the drama of this confrontation—Schevering, Telepaath, and Frank Stamper, Infidel. Claude Pettifer

looked down indulgently from his box and smiled. Hettie Templeton looked a little as if she were going to cry. It wasn't a bit like Frank to show himself up in this way, she thought.

"Would you like to tell me or anyone else in the house what it is you want Schevering to do?" asked the manager.

"I would not," said Frank.

"Then you promise to admit it, if he does exactly what you want him to do?"

"I do."

"You know that you must convey your commands to Schevering in simple stages, item by item?"

"Yes, I do."

It sounded a little like a catechism in a court of law. There was a tittering here and there, followed by angry cries of, "Hush! Hush!"

The manager turned to the telepathist. "*Los, Schevering!*" he bade. Schevering raised himself to his full height, thrust his head backwards, and stood there sniffing, almost as if it was through his nostrils rather than his brain he received his orders. His eyes were closed. His closed fists were held out horizontally before him.

Bend down towards my seat, commanded the brain of Frank Stamper. Schevering stood there swaying a little, uncertain. The order had not got across to him.

Bend down towards my seat, commanded Frank again. Slowly, a little dubiously, Schevering bent down towards Frank's seat.

Let me get out of the way, he bade. Schevering turned his head towards him like a blind man turning to a voice that has addressed him.

That's right. You've been right all the time. I've been a fool. What are you shaking your head like that for? What are you screwing our eyes up like that for?

Oh, I think I see. I mustn't muddle up the issue with extraneous ideas. I must get straight on with it. Very well, then.

There is something thin and flat under my seat. Pick it up. No, not that tram-ticket. Much bigger than that. It is wrapped up in brown paper and string. That's right. Pick it up.

Schevering duly picked the thing up. It might have been a poster wrapped up in paper, or a photograph, or a piece of three-ply wood. He held it up and showed it to the audience. His eyes were still closed.

No, said the brain of Frank Stamper. *That's not all I want from you. Get back to the stage at once. Do you hear? Get back to the stage at once.*

Holding the thing in brown paper still before him, and with his eyes half opened now, Schevering walked to the small staircase and climbed up to the stage again. He stood there near the wings, as if waiting to find out if anything more were wanted from him or no.

"Has the gentleman finished the experiment?" asked the manager.

"No," said Frank.

"The gentleman isn't easily pleased. That's all right to us. Would the gentleman like to go on to the stage?"

"No. I'll stay here."

"All the better. Will you continue, please?"

Get to the middle of the stage. Schevering went obediently over to the middle of the stage. *Take the string and brown paper off the parcel.* Schevering fumbled about a little awkwardly, then waited, doing nothing.

Very well then. One thing at a time. Take the string off the parcel. Schevering took the string off the parcel. *Take the brown paper off now.* He took the brown paper off.

The thing that had been wrapped up was an oblong piece of cardboard, a panel of blackness mounted on cream cardboard. It looked very much like a photograph. The photograph almost slipped from Schevering's hand, or he almost let it fall.

No, you fool. Don't anticipate. One thing at a time. Let everybody in Weaving see who it is. Lift it up high. Schevering lifted the photograph high.

Turn round with it from left to right. He turned round with it from left to right. *And from right to left.*

All Weaving could see who it was. It was Hettie Templeton and Claude Pettifer, with their hands on each other's shoulders. They looked tenderly into each other's eyes. But the real Hettie and the real Claude, where they sat in their box, were not looking tenderly into each other's eyes. Claude was looking straight before him, his cheeks pale as chalk, his eyes almost glassy with horror. Hettie had her hands before her eyes. Tears were trickling down her cheeks.

Now throw the photograph on to the floor. Schevering duly threw the photograph down. You could have heard a fly

buzzing against a mirror, so intense was the quiet in the little music-hall.

Now, now, tread on it ! Do you bear ? Tread on it ! Tread on it ! Wipe it out ! Like a door-mat ! Harder ! Faster ! Harder ! Faster ! Harder ! Faster !

Schevering danced like a negro in Harlem, like a dervish in the desert. The sweat poured from his brow in streams, and in streams from the brow of Frank Stamper. Claude Pettifer in his box had not moved one fraction of an inch. He still held the ledge of the box before him with fingers pale as celery. His eyes were still filmy as glass balls. Hettie Templeton was blubbering like a whipped schoolgirl.

The thunders of applause that greeted the apocalyptic success of the experiment brought the plaster down in flakes from the gilt cherubs above the proscenium arch. There was not a squeak of opposition. "Well done, mister !" they roared, for they could not bring themselves to pronounce the outlandish name. "Well done, mister !" And, "Well done, Frank !" they added. "That was a right one !" they cried. "Well done, Frank !"

And indeed it was a right one. It was quite impossible for Claude Pettifer to stay on in Weaving after this dreadful humiliation, and quite impossible for Hettie Templeton to consider with anything but distaste the prospect of marrying him. So Claude Pettifer returned to photograph shoulder-blades in the Chiswick High Road, till such time as he could establish his *atelier* in a region worthy of his talents. And Hettie Templeton and Frank Stamper got married in Weaving the following April, on the very date that had been originally arranged between them. Schevering, Telepaath, and his manager were in Bradford on the day of the marriage, but they did not forget to send the happy pair a telegram, in addition to the nice little beaten-pewter coffee-set they had sent on earlier.

NO THOROUGHFARE



ROLAND PERTWEE

ROLAND PERTWEE began his career as a painter, but abandoned this later in favour of the stage. Towards the end of his stage career, however, he developed a pronounced liking for writing, and this has been his métier ever since. He has written chiefly for the stage, but has also published several novels and that excellent collection of short stories *Fish are such Liars*.

NO THOROUGHFARE

THERE are some persons who take no pleasure in approaching an object by a direct route. Muriel Drayle was like that. She gloried and she revelled in intrigue. Not vulgar intrigue, it should be stated, for Lady Drayle was a good and a loyal wife, devoted to her husband whom she never tired of deceiving in a multitude of ways. Like her late father, General Sir Branksome Cloud, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., she had no faith in the principle of frontal attack. This characteristic had earned for him the sobriquets "Round-The-Corner Cloud" and "Smoke-Screen Cloud."

Muriel had admired the General immensely and strove to pattern her ways on his. And well it was for her that she did so, for Sir Maurice Drayle, her husband, had the firmly established and infuriating habit of standing in the path of everything that he saw coming.

Sir Maurice was a born obstructionist. The mere suggestion that it would be a good idea to do so and so on the estate was quite enough to make him stop it.

Muriel was full of such ideas. Plots, plans and schemes gathered round her like a swarm of bees. But would Sir Maurice lift a finger to help her mature them? Not he. He thwarted them. He pulled them up by the roots. He stamped them flat.

Muriel had a perfectly clear conception of how best to deal with a financial depression. You must expand. Sir Maurice had an equally clear conception. You must contract. The result was a house divided. His policy of retrenchment was opposed by a strong but unrevealed policy of Spend More.

Her chief difficulty, and as some people believed, delight, lay in concealing from Sir Maurice the nature of her operations until it was too late for him to frustrate them. Sir Maurice was no fool and his suspicions were easily aroused. To keep

him in the dark, the number of deceptions that she was compelled to practice would have driven a less determined woman into an insane asylum.

Muriel Drayle did not believe in facing trouble before it was unavoidable. Until such a time she carried on a campaign of lies, distortions and evasions, secure in the knowledge the end justified the means. Her conscience never disturbed her, for she told herself that it was Maurice's fault that things must be done that way.

The habit of detaching blame from herself was inherited. Her father owed his military successes to an astonishing gift for shifting responsibility for the follies he had committed from the higher to the lower ranks of his command. He perished with a spotless record and provided an example to all men to go and do likewise.

It was the custom of the Drayles to breakfast early. Thus was Sir Maurice enabled to put in an hour's exercise before confronting the sterner duties of the day. Recently he had sold his hunters and taken to golf largely and scientifically. One of the most impressive sights in the neighbourhood was to behold the baronet, equipped with a driver and a captive ball, standing beneath a cedar tree, some three hundred years of age, grooving his swing.

Beside his plate at the breakfast table was a copy of Morrison's *New Way to Better Golf*, and as Sir Maurice masticated toast and marmalade he committed to memory passages from that work such as should ensure for him the winning of many half-crowns upon the links.

"I've got this driving business taped," he announced and frowned at Muriel as though daring her to deny it. "There are only two things—wrists and pointing your chin at the ball."

Muriel had no sympathy with golf. It was not, in her opinion, a game in which large landowners should display themselves. How much better if he would develop the estate and buy hunters rather than sell them and point his chin at a ball!

Sir Maurice closed the book with the air of a man to whom the problems of the future have been made clear and moved towards the door.

"What are you going to do this morning?" asked Muriel. She knew that he objected to interrogations, but it was

vital to the success of her plans that she should have a clear idea of his movements.

His eyebrows rose.

"Does it matter, my dear?"

It might matter very much, but she did not tell him so.

"I just like to know," she said.

"I have some letters to write. After that I may run over and see Spender—explain to him this business about the chin."

He could not be expected to understand what provoked the gasp of horror that greeted his words. The shortest way to Colonel Spender's lay through Mindle Lane, and in Mindle Lane was the old Tithe barn that Muriel was having converted into a modern residence. In another week or two the building operations would be too far advanced for Sir Maurice to put a stop to them. But now—at this moment—well!

If Muriel had not been so startled she would never have committed the folly of trying to dissuade him.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, Maurie."

"I have every intention."

"But the Parminters are coming to lunch. Don't you want to be here to meet them?"

"No."

Muriel Drayle pressed fingertips to the corners of her eyes.

"Sometimes I think," she said, "you don't *want* to please me."

Sir Maurice assumed the manner that he adopted on the bench. Practical argument tinged with pity.

"Why it should please you to keep Spender in the dark as to the proper position to put his chin while make a golf stroke is a problem I fail to understand. 'Pon my soul, Muriel, anybody would think you were touched."

"Then you mean to go?"

"Certainly," and he went from the room to where a captive ball waited to prove to him that there were still mysteries in the game of which he was not master.

Muriel did not despair. The situation was critical, but she faced it. As yet she had no idea what to do, but by hook or by crook he must be prevented from going down Mindle Lane.

From a peg in the hall she took a leather motoring-coat

and put it on over her *peignoir*. There was no time to change. The mules she was wearing, with their ostrich feather fringes, looked out of place and incongruous beneath the coat, but that couldn't be helped.

In the courtyard she met the gardener carrying punnets of raspberries. She told him to put them in the car. They might come in useful as bribes.

It was not until she was half-way down the drive that she thought of the Rector. The Rev. James Speed was not a man to accept bribes, but she felt that his cloth would banish suspicion if he would consent to become her accomplice. After all, he owed the Drayles a great deal for giving him the living and as a man of religion devoted to truth, he ought to be able, by the exercise of opposites, to invent a plausible lie to deal with the emergency. All that mattered was to keep Sir Maurice out of Mindle Lane.

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The boy, Flick Saunders, had devoured two helpings of honey and would have grabbed a third had not the Rev. James Speed impounded the pot to rest his copy of *The Times* against. The Rector was a timid man, a thought lacking in moral courage. It was easier to use the honey pot as a prop than to tell the boy that he had had enough. He soothed his conscience for this weakness with the reflection that Flick was, in a sense, a guest. It was the Rector's practice during vacations, to take one or two backward boys and instruct them in those articles of learning which compose the Common Entrance.

At the other end of the table his sister, Esme, was turning the pages of the *Daily Sketch* and eating toast. For an otherwise quiet woman she had rather a noisy and appreciative way of eating toast.

"Crunch, crunch, crunch—good, good, good!" it went.

As she crunched she read aloud disconnected fragments of news.

The Rector wished she would eat less noisily and not read loud. But he kept the wishes to himself. He envied her the *Daily Sketch* and would have preferred it to *The Times*. His eyesight was not as good as it used to be and it would

have been pleasanter to see the news than read it. However, he did not tell her so.

All roads to the honey pot being jammed, Flick Saunders allowed his attention to focus upon the girl, Pam Speed, niece of the Rev. James and Esme. She had arrived overnight and he hoped she would soon go. She looked too clean. Her frock had a laundered crispness about it, abhorrent to the eye. He did not take into consideration the fact, since this was her first morning away, that her parents were probably to blame for this spotlessness. She had been defined before arrival as "a nice friend for him to take round and show everything."

At all costs that must be avoided. He did not regard her as a nice friend, but as an obstacle to joy. There was no place for Pam in his formula of happiness, which, at present, was centred upon a pair of drop handlebars wherewith to convert his push-bike into a racer. The handlebars were on view in the village cycle shop, price fifteen and six. Flick desired them, but lacked the fifteen and six. For the last three days he had spent most of his time with his nose glued to the shop window and he was planning to spend the fourth day in the same way.

Without any hope of success he addressed his host:

"I suppose I couldn't have fifteen and six, sir, and you get it from my father?"

It was a troublesome question, for the Rector liked to appear the soul of generosity. He hedged.

"I cannot believe your father would wish you to have such a large sum. And now, unless you want some more honey, why not run out and enjoy the sunlight?"

As Flick went into the garden he wondered why people always wanted you to enjoy yourself in their way rather than your own. If the Rector had said "Run out and enjoy your handlebars" it would have been different. Or wouldn't it? Perhaps he would have resented the disclosure of his intimate and personal sources of joy.

On the path to the stables he was overtaken by Pam.

"Look here! I'm going out on my bike," he said.

Breakfast had been rather dull and Pam welcomed the discovery of someone to fight with.

"You're one of Uncle Jim's backward boys, aren't you?" she inquired, innocently.

Flick Saunders launched a yell as he rushed at her. Pam squealed as she fled. Their cries rose to heaven and filtered through the window of Caroline Daren's bedroom.

Caroline pressed the palms of her hands against her ears to shut out the sound. She thought :

"My nerves ! Oh, to be out East and away from it all !"

How wrong she had been ever to leave the East. Her soul belonged there, beneath a river of stars flowing across a sapphire sky, where the tom-toms beat and one could hear the plaint of native songs and rain, warm as tears, falling—falling.

What if there had been yellow fever in the district ? Death was nothing—the spirit everything.

"Oh, to be a martyr for one's soul's sake !" she thought.

A breeze stirred the sheets of her bed. It was a draught. Perhaps she would catch cold. She *would* catch cold if she got out of a warm bed to shut the window.

Then, from below :

"Beast, take that !"

And a muddy splash.

Caroline Daren risked everything—life itself. Before shutting the window she called down :

"Go away, you dreadful children !"

Back in bed she reflected upon how much she loved little ones. But the children you met weren't children—they were noises. Those she loved were different. They curled up on one's knee ; they had warm arms for putting round one's neck ; they cuddled, they whispered, they were infinitely dependent. And nearly all the time they were asleep.

She sighed. What a pity it was there were no children like that and never would be. How she would love them if there were.

"If only I could do something in life to prove how little I care for myself !" she said aloud.

She sipped the tea on her breakfast tray and found it cold. She rang the bell. Florrie answered it and seemed put out and disagreeable. She left the room muttering. Yet surely it was not much trouble to make a fresh pot of tea ? How unwilling were people to serve !

Selfish, selfish, selfish !

Downstairs James Speed was saying :

"Your cousin Caroline having her breakfast in bed ?

She'll make herself *really* ill if she doesn't buck up and do something."

Esme saw no sense in endorsing what was obvious to everybody. She commented on a paragraph in the newspaper.

"So the Mayor of Dudley has given Dorothy Round a civic welcome and a diamond wrist-watch. Fancy!"

But the Rector was only listening with half his intelligence.

"Whether girls are wise in accepting presents from men," he mused.

"I suppose you know," said Esme, "that Muriel Drayle has started another of her building pranks?"

The Rector held up a hand.

"I wish to hear nothing about it," he said. "I know it will lead to a lot of lies and deceptions with which I refuse to be mixed up. Where is this going on?"

"Mindle Lane."

"I think it is very inconsiderate of you to have mentioned it." He sighed and added, more hopefully: "Thank goodness Mindle Lane is off the track so far as Sir Maurice is concerned."

And that was the moment Muriel Drayle was shown into the room. Following her usual practice she approached the subject of her visit through a maze of parenthesis.

"I have brought you some raspberries—I'm in great trouble—but they got rather squashed in the car. I gave a lift to Mr. Franklin who didn't notice them and I couldn't tell him because he was wearing white flannels. You see, Sir Maurice is certain to stop it if he finds out."

"Stop the raspberries?" the Rector inquired, and wondered why she wore a leather coat in midsummer.

But Esme understood and urged her to go on.

So Muriel went on.

It appeared that the old barn was no use as it was, but would be charming. Four bedrooms and two sitting-rooms. There was some doubt as to whether there would be any water, but they would be sure to find some if they dug deep enough.

"At a time like this it would be criminal to allow such a chance to slip through one's fingers. You do see that, don't you, Rector?"

"But if Sir Maurice objects . . ." he began, and stopped

in astonishment on beholding a nightdress beneath the leather coat.

"I don't mind him objecting one bit as long as he is too late to prevent me. Besides, I know I am doing right. Only this morning I had clear proof that Providence was on my side."

It was an astonishing assertion, and the Rector asked what made her believe that.

"Sir Maurice actually *told* me that he was going down Mindle Lane." She nodded triumphantly and added: "That was why I came straight to you."

The Rector groaned inwardly. It was not politic to throw up his hands at the actions of a leading parishioner, so he buried them in the pockets of his alpaca coat for safety.

Muriel went on:

"I said to myself if there is one man who can lead him away from discovering the truth it is you."

"I must really protest against that, Lady Drayle."

"Nonsense," said Esme. "You being a clergyman, he is more or less bound to believe anything you tell him."

"But it is no part of a clergyman's duties to circulate falsehoods, Esme. Besides, how can I prevent Sir Maurice from going where he likes?"

"I had thought," said Muriel, "that it would be quite a good idea if you were to ring him up and challenge him to play golf this morning for ten shillings. You could say that you had found out a new grip and were sure you could beat him."

"But Sir Maurice is perfectly aware that I do not play golf. Furthermore, I have not found out a new grip, neither am I in a position to sacrifice ten shillings."

Muriel Drayle smiled beatifically.

"As it happens, Rector, this time I shall not have to call on you. Twice this morning Providence has worked on my side. Right in the middle of the main road I found one of those 'Caution. Road Repairs. No Thoroughfare' boards. It was a gift from Heaven."

It was no use trying to stop them. The Rector's hands were thrown up.

"But surely you did not remove the board?"

Muriel Drayle frowned. Timidity she could forgive, but not stupidity.

"Of course I did. What else was it there for?"

"To indicate some excavations, perhaps."

"My dear man, you will never get anywhere unless you are prepared to take a few risks. The finger of fate was in it. Nobody *saw* me put it in my car."

"Well, I think it was very clever of you," said Esme. "Have you put it up in Mindle Lane?"

Muriel Drayle loved appreciation and she leaned across the table to pat Esme's hand.

"I am on my way to do so now."

The Rev. James turned quite white.

"And in the meantime the board is in your car—outside my Rectory?"

Muriel was not a woman who readily condemned other people, but she could not fail to see that the Rector was not acting towards her in a spirit of true friendship. It was, after all, the duty of a clergyman to help those in trouble, and he was not doing it.

There was something quite chilly in her manner as she rose to take her departure.

"Sometimes," she said, "I am glad to feel that I have a head on my shoulders and do not have to rely solely upon my friends. Good morning, and I hope you will enjoy the raspberries."

Flick Saunders and Pam Speed were playing with the mascot on the radiator of her car as she walked into the drive. Because she was feeling rather hurt she did not reply to Flick's inquiry:

"How fast will she go?"

"Stand away, there's good children," she said, and let in the gears to an accompaniment of grinding and protesting cogs.

When she was gone, Flick said:

"What had she got that board in the back of the car for?"

But Pam had seen something stranger than that.

"She had on bedroom slippers."

At the entrance to Mindle Lane Muriel Drayle erected the 'No Thoroughfare' board, propping it up from behind with a piece of stick. Like an artist, she fell back to admire in a good light.

She thought it looked very imposing. Maurice would have no choice but to turn back when he beheld it.

As it was unlikely he would be along for another twenty minutes, she drove down the lane as far as the barn to interview the builder. She told him that the workmen could have five pounds between them if they didn't breathe a word to anybody for a fortnight. As an afterthought, she asked what the work of reconstruction was going to cost, to which the builder replied that it would be hard to say. He volunteered the information that plumbing would probably be the heaviest item.

So Muriel Drayle decided to put in a second bathroom, and then walked through the fields, under cover of the hedge, to mark Maurice's reaction on beholding the board.

One might have supposed that a man, by nature an obstructionist, would have turned aside from the presence of an obstacle in a spirit of sympathy and understanding. Not so Sir Maurice. As he backed his car out of the lane on to the main road he swore fulminously. He had no idea, of course, that his oaths reached the ears of his hidden wife. Had he known he would have denied her the satisfaction of hearing them.

Through a gap in the hedgerow Muriel watched him drive away with just that extra turn of speed which anger provokes a man to communicate to a machine.

"*That's* all right!" said she.

The delight she felt in the success of her manoeuvre prompted her to celebrate it in some practical and permanent way. So she returned to the barn and gave instructions for yet another bathroom to be installed.

"The Americans are right. You can't have too many," she said.

There was some difficulty to find anywhere to put it, but that was overcome by knocking down a recently erected partition and stealing three feet from one of the smaller bedrooms, which thereby became so small that no wall in it was long enough to stand a bed against.

These dispositions occupied time, and the morning had nearly sped when Muriel faced the responsibility of returning the board to its original standing-place.

As her car rounded the bend on the main road behind which the board had been erected, a crowd of onlookers, motor-cycles and motor-cars, impeded its progress. Above the screen they formed Muriel beheld Sir Maurice's car

with its nose apparently buried in a hole in the roadway.

If there was one thing that Muriel Drayle possessed *in excelsis* it was presence of mind. The rapidity with which she lowered the blinds at the back of her car so as to conceal what was within, was remarkable. It was not the moment to inquire whether anybody had been hurt. The one thing to be done, and done at once, was to bury the body—destroy the evidence.

It was not that Muriel Drayle was in the least bit heartless. On the contrary. She was devoted to her husband, but what would it profit him to learn that it was through her agency that calamity had overtaken him? Nothing. From the viewpoint of their marital happiness it was better far that he should suspect anybody but herself. What had her own father done at Villers Brettoneux? He had denied that he gave the order—he had destroyed the chit on which he had written it—and he had died respected.

A wreath of smoke rising from the Rectory garden pointed a line of action. The clock on the dashboard of her car told Muriel that the Rector and his family would be at lunch. In the circumstances what had to be done could be done—and privily.

As Muriel Drayle, in *peignoir* and ostrich feather slippers, for she was using her leather coat as a wrapper for the board, crept into the Rectory garden and approached the incinerator she perceived, in what was happening, a poetic justice. For had not the Rector shown marked unwillingness to help? He had. It was a judgment, surely, that into his incinerator the board should go and the evidence of her guilt be consumed.

The board was crackling merrily as Muriel Drayle returned to her car. It was not until the homeward drive that she allowed herself to be really worried about what might have befallen Sir Maurice. As she went up the drive she looked in vain to find him beneath the cedar. Naught save the captive ball was there, disconsolate and yearning for the hand that should be smiting it upon its restricted travels.

Her footsteps faltered as she entered the house, and the relief she felt on beholding Maurice in the library, that faced the front door, was too great for words.

There was a large bump on his forehead, emphasised by iodine. His brows were down and the expression of his mouth was inimical.

"Had a nice game of golf, Maurie?" Muriel asked.

"Yes, with me as the ball," he retorted. Then, striking a more human note: "I suppose it isn't apparent to you that I have had an accident."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "your forehead!" and ran to him.

But though he loved her deeply, he fended her off; being a man whose habit it was to postpone endearments indefinitely.

"Go away. I don't want to be messed about. I've been messed about enough and somebody is going to pay for it, I can tell you that."

A feeling that the hand had not been played out attacked Muriel with a sudden chill.

Sir Maurice went on:

"One isn't a J.P. for nothing, and when the police find out who moved that board there's going to be hell to pay. I don't care who did it, I'll have him juggled. Into the jug whoever he is. Why I wasn't killed, I don't know! It's a miracle!"

It was not a happy inspiration that led Muriel to suggest:

"But don't you think, Maurie, as you weren't killed, it would be best to let the whole thing slip and just be thankful. After all, it may have been a blessing in disguise."

Sir Maurice looked at her in pity.

"If you think being tipped head first into a hole in the road is a blessing, disguised or otherwise, it is obvious to me that the state of your mind needs looking into. And now, for goodness' sake, go and get out of those infernal night clothes."

As Muriel went from the room she told herself that it was going to be all right—that it must be.

Providence was still on the side of Muriel Drayle in that she was in the room when the Chief Constable rang up Sir Maurice.

"Chief Constable? Yes," he said.

It was the work of a few seconds for Muriel to run out and pick up the telephone in her boudoir. The Chief Constable was a slow starter so she missed nothing of importance.

"A most hawkward situation, your Worship. Never would've come to light for for a coin-side-ance. The Urban dustmen, Your Worship. Seems that the Rector arranged with him to cart off the ash from the sinerator as well as the

other muck. An' this 'e does, scraping it hout an' findin' among the hash the 'arf burned board. If it hadn't so 'appened has 'e was passin' when the haccident hoccurred it's odds he wouldn't 've noticed nothin'. Not knowin' 'ow best to hact he brings the board to me. Hit's a mos' delicate situation, as you'll be firs' to admit."

"Why?" That was Sir Maurice.

"Well, the Rector is the Rector, whatever may be said to the contrary."

"Meet me at the Rectory in quarter of an hour. I'll have him in the jug."

Muriel Drayle waited to hear no more. Her car was fleeting down the drive five minutes before Sir Maurice started.

Her mind was in a chaos. Somehow the Rector must be prevailed upon to take the blame. "Times were bad," he must say. "He needed a little firing." He had found the board lying flat in the road. He had not turned it over to read its warning message. He would have done so but he was thinking of his sermon. He burnt it because it was rubbish. No, he burnt it as an example to Wolf Cubs to pick up sandwich wrappers and other litter. There were dozens of plausible excuses that he could make. The police would never prosecute a Rector. It would be such a bad example to his flock. His dog, a retriever, had brought it back.

Thoughts swirled as in a maelstrom.

Her car stopped in the Rectory drive and, suddenly, she lacked the strength to get out. Behind a fringe of rhododendrons children's voices were raised in altercation.

Flick's voice:

"You won't lend it because you haven't got it. Never had as much as fifteen and six in the whole of your life."

And Pam's:

"Bet I have then. Got four pounds thirteen in the Post Office savings."

"Bet you haven't got the book, though."

"Wouldn't tell you if I had."

Through her own mental disturbances Muriel realized that, in the near neighbourhood, there was someone who greatly desired fifteen shillings and sixpence. Was it possible that once again, and in a supreme emergency, Providence was acting on her behalf?

She put her head out of the car and called :

"Little boy, little boy !"

Pam made a face at Flick. Muriel's appellation was a nasty jar to one who had been trying to put over big stuff all the morning.

"Ta-ta, little boy, little boy," she mimicked, and made off.

Flick pushed through the bushes and approached the car morosely.

"Well ? I wasn't doing any harm," he said.

Muriel spoke rapidly. Would he like to earn a pound ? He certainly would. He must understand that he might get into trouble. When was he ever out of trouble ? Serious trouble ! He would be ready to take six of the best for a pound.

"Very well, then, listen."

Flick did not listen very hard. He was thinking of the drop handlebars. Already they were declining brilliantly before his famished eyes.

Yes, of course he'd do it. A telling off from a beak wouldn't be any worse than a telling off from the Head at Bankside. He'd think up some yarn to explain why he had taken the thing. When would he touch the money ?

She would have given it to him then and there had not the Rector made an untimely appearance. He had seen her talking to Flick from the window of his study and was disturbed. Why should she ? The answer to his question arrived in two motor cars—a two-seater with the Chief Constable and a sergeant aboard, and Sir Maurice in the Rolls.

Then Esme came from the house.

As the local dignitaries approached, the Rev. James Speed was painfully aware that his knees were knocking together. The Chief Constable opened the proceedings with a breezy comment on weather conditions. But Sir Maurice came straight to the point.

Did the Rector see this bruise ? Would he like to know how it was come by ? He should know. Some congenital idiot had removed a warning board from the King's Highway. Result, smashed car and contused frontal bone. Did the Rector know anything about that board ? He didn't. Then how the devil did the board in question come to be found in the rectorial incinerator ?

In the pause that followed these staggering questions the Rev. James turned beseeching eyes upon Muriel Drayle. But her expression was adamant. She looked very much as her father must have looked at Neuve Chapel when the Corps Commander asked him why a certain section of the line had not been held.

"It is no good looking at me, Mr. Speed," she said. "My husband was nearly killed and we want to know why."

"But . . . but . . . but . . ." he stammered.

"But be damned!" roared Sir Maurice. "I'm here to get at the truth, and somebody is going through the hoops when I do. Now then!"

It was the habit of Caroline Daren during the afternoon to walk once round the garden, pausing here and there to inhale the subtle fragrance of such flowers as possessed any. For the fulfilment of this æsthetic pastime quiet and tranquillity were essentials. Voices raised in anger and dispute rob the world of its beauty. On this particular afternoon Caroline particularly desired peace. Her mind was troubled by thoughts of the harsh words she had uttered from her bedroom window earlier in the day. True she had been provoked, but the words would not adjust themselves to the character of martyrdom she had assumed for herself. She felt that she would do anything—anything to wipe them out. And now the course of her reflections was being disturbed by rude argument and recrimination. Only vaguely she apprehended what it was all about. Someone had removed a notice board and the Rector was suspected.

Conquering her natural reticence, she drew a little nearer. As she did so, yet another arrival joined the throng. The Doctor. He had called to see her, for she was under his treatment, but he did not regard the case as so urgent that he could not spare a minute or two to find out what the row was about.

Dr. Smale had no need to take the contestants back to the starting post, for it was he who had applied the iodine to Sir Maurice's brow. He was therefore aware how the accident had happened and was immensely diverted to discover that the Rector was suspected as an active agent in the affair. This fact was evident from the vehemence with which the Rev. James was protesting his innocence.

"I give you my word as a member of the Church. . . ."

Sir Maurice waved him down and spun round on Esme.
“Did *you* see him bring anything back?”

Esme shook her head.

“Not actually.”

“There you are!” said the Rector.

But Esme had not finished. She thought: It is no good quarrelling with Muriel Drayle. She is a sweet and generous creature, but she is apt to turn a little nasty if she thinks she has been let down. It might be more sensible to suffer some unpleasantness than get on the wrong side of her.

So Esme added:

“But you know how absent-minded you are, James. And you often *do* bring very funny things home. Like mushrooms—and there was that whiting that you had in your pocket for nearly a week when we had the drains up.”

“I deny it all,” he wailed.

“No one will convince me,” said Sir Maurice, “that the most absent-minded lunatic in the land is going to remove a notice board from a main road and remember nothing about it. Whoever did it had better own up, because if I don’t get at the truth the insurance company who cover my car, jolly soon will.”

Until then Muriel Drayle had stood apart from it all—an onlooker—much as her father stood on Hill 60 watching the battle waging below. She realized, even as he had, that casualties are inevitable in a major operation.

But she had forgotten that there might be trouble with the insurance company. She made a mental note to drop them a line telling them to see her before they did anything drastic. It would be rather bad luck on Flick’s father if he got landed with the price of a new car. It would be nobody’s fault if he did, of course, but it would be nice to prevent it if possible.

It seemed to her that the time was now ripe for Flick’s confession. She had not hurried the boy because she felt that it was only just that the Rector should suffer a little as a penalty for unwillingness to help. It would be good discipline for him and should make him more ready in the future. She was very pleased with the way Esme Speed had acted. Most sensibly. A reliable, understanding sort of woman. Esme should have some of the William pears when they were ripe.

The boy, Flick Saunders, was entangling his fingers with a piece of string when Muriel's eyes caught his and her lips framed a silent "now." He supposed it was all right—he hoped so—but he couldn't help wondering, and he couldn't help wishing he had that quid in his pocket to strengthen the determination to go through with it.

"Now !" the silent lips repeated.

But still he hesitated.

Then Muriel Drayle, as it were, seized him by the collar and chucked him in. For she said :

"I wonder what this little boy looks so guilty about !"

All eyes were turned upon Flick. His own he closed, and, in a vision, beheld chromium-plated drop handle-bars with the road beneath them streaming past at an unimaginable speed. His mind was made up. He stepped forward. He struck an attitude.

"I did it," he said.

Surely the spirit of George Washington must have put the words into his mouth, eliminating the corollary "with my little hatchet."

The silence that followed this noble confession was broken by three distinct sounds. A staggering intake of breath from Caroline Daren—the name "Lady Drayle !" from the Rector, and a crisp "What a lie !" from Pam Speed.

Then came a babel of tongues all speaking at once. But for that Flick would never have had the chance to scrag Pam's arm and hiss the warning :

"Shut up, you fool, shut up !"

"You can't have. We were together all the morning," she cried.

In the second at his disposal Flick achieved the swiftest piece of mathematical reckoning in his career.

"Four and six if you shut up."

Then the Chief Constable took the stage.

"'Old your noise, the both of you." And out came his notebook. "Now, young man, what did you think you was doing of in doing it ?"

"But he didn't," insisted Pam, and there were tears in her eyes, for adversity had made her feel that Flick Saunders was the best proposition she had met to date.

The Chief Constable threatened her with his pencil.

"Silence all !" he said.

But Sir Maurice had taken a fancy to Pam Speed. She was a good kid. Stood up for her pals. Provided 'em with alibis. Dammit, he liked her and he said so.

Muriel, too, admired her. It was a pity that a certain senior member of her family did not take a leaf out of the child's book and show a like disposition to rally round a friend.

Then the Chief Constable got down to it in a big way. Nothing was to be gained by hiding the truth. What made Flick do it?

Flick's confident avowal that he would be able to put up a story proved to be unfounded. The theory, common among actors imperfectly acquainted with their lines, that it will be all right on the night, was exploded. In vain he searched his imagination for a single reason why a boy should remove a notice board from the King's highway.

"I . . . I . . . don't know!"

Muriel Drayle fanned herself with a pound note to give him courage and resource. It was no good. Flick looked despairingly to right and left. All the brightness had gone out of life. Even plated handle-bars were dull.

And witnessing his despair, Caroline Daren came to a sudden resolve. With uplifted hands, like Niobe, she thrust herself between the law and its victim.

"It was I!" she declared.

Her grammar was flawless—her martyrdom supreme. Departed was the stigma of harshness. She stood alone, bearing another's burden.

Dr. Smale spoke. The Rector couldn't have spoken if he had tried. Even Muriel was dumb, for she barely knew Caroline Daren by sight. She had never even worked on her. It couldn't be the raspberries.

The doctor said:

"But weren't you in bed all the morning?"

"No. I rose from my bed. *They* know." She turned the eyes of a wounded fawn upon the children.

But there was no gratitude in Flick's expression.

"She's trying to get that quid for herself," he muttered. But Flick was no longer the centre of notice.

"Hush!" said Muriel, and thrust the crumpled note into his moist palm.

The Chief Constable scratched his head with the pencil.

"When everything's done and said all, it don't make sense," he announced.

Then Caroline :

"I can explain. The boy knew I was ill. He had seen what I did and tried to save me."

"Bunk !" said Pam, under her breath.

"My dear Caroline, you don't know what you are saying," protested the Rector.

"Yes, yes, I do. Where I came from—the East—there are no restrictions. Life flows on. To see an obstacle—to read 'So far you shall go and no further' to me is like being bound with cords. I feel I have to open up all the ways. That was why, when I saw that board . . ."

"I think," said Dr. Smale, "you had better go back to bed, Miss Daren. You are evidently not yourself this afternoon."

Caroline nodded, fatalistically.

"Yes, very well. You will find me there—if I'm wanted—to pay the price."

She turned and was gone.

Sir Maurice tapped his forehead.

"Cracked—obviously !" he said.

The Chief Constable sighed heavily.

"Puts me in a very hawkward predic-ay-ment. Are we to charge the lady, Sir Maurice ?"

A protesting cry sprang from the lips of the Rector, but Sir Maurice's attention seemed to have wandered. He was looking at his wife, who was wearing an expression of absolute triumph. Yet nothing had happened that would seem to account for it. Was it possible, that all this embroglio was another of those smoke screens discharged by Muriel for his confusion ? Was she up to something ?

Swiftly and narrowly he ran his mind over the events of the day. Breakfast : her horror at the idea of his visit to Colonel Spender. The drive and a "No Thoroughfare" board in Mindle Lane. That board ! Could it be that . . .

Sir Maurice crooked a finger at the Chief Constable and drew him aside from the rest.

"Look here ! I want to know something. Is the road up in Mindle Lane ?"

"No, sir."

"Sure of that ?"

"I come through the lane on my way here."

"Any obstructions?"

"Well, there was a builder's lorry held us up for a minute, but you couldn't call that properly an obstruction."

Sir Maurice smiled. The builder's lorry had told him what he wanted to know.

"I shan't prosecute, Chief. We'll forget the whole thing."

It was the Chief Constable who made public Sir Maurice's magnanimity. He added a rider to the effect that people might not get off so lightly another time.

"So all's well that ends well," said Muriel.

Then Sir Maurice spoke.

"Who said anything about ending? I'd like you to come with me in the Rolls, my dear."

"But I have my own car, Maurie."

"The chauffeur can bring that back. Come along. I've a little surprise for you."

His manner seemed all right and Muriel decided that it would be folly to cross him. He handed her into the car and then remembered something that sent him back to the porch, where the Speeds had gathered. Upon the Rector Sir Maurice directed a glare at once hostile and corrective.

"It's my opinion," he said, "if you do a thing you should do it thoroughly. You haven't. The kids were all right; so was your sister and that cracked cousin of yours. But you didn't appear to know which way you were facing."

"But, Sir Maurice, don't you realize . . ."

"I realize that if my wife wants a friend she is entitled to have one. Good Lord, you don't imagine, with the whole neighbourhood on her side, she'd ever succeed in fooling me? Better for everyone if you were to mix a bit of loyalty with your religion. Where are those kids? There you are! Spend that among yourselves."

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About two minutes later Muriel asked nervously:

"Aren't you going the wrong way, Maurie?"

"I never go the wrong way," and he turned the car off the main road.

She thought: "It's just possible he may not take Mindle Lane. If he does I'll point at a covey of partridges on the

other side of the road. I'll say 'Just look at that lark !' as we pass the barn. Providence can't—can't be so cruel as to spoil everything after being so splendid."

Aloud, and rather plaintively, she said :

"I suppose you have got rid of something else, and that is your surprise."

"No." He sounded very cheerful about it.

"If it is seeing you point your chin at a golf ball I shan't enjoy it much."

"It isn't," said he.

There : the car had entered Mindle Lane. He stole a glance at her. The added colour on her cheeks made her look almost a girl. He thought : She's a damned attractive woman and I'm very fond of her. He thought : It'll hurt her like blazes to have her secret exploded. He thought : Why shouldn't she enjoy her little deceptions ? We are all made different.

He put his foot on the brake and the car came to a stand-still just before the bend behind which the barn would be in view.

"Why are you stopping here?" she faltered, for she had steeled herself to face the worst.

"Wrong road," he replied.

Hope revived.

"Why, so it is."

He put the car into reverse.

Only by the exercise of magnificent self-control was Muriel able to preserve an air of indifference. By the same agency she went on talking.

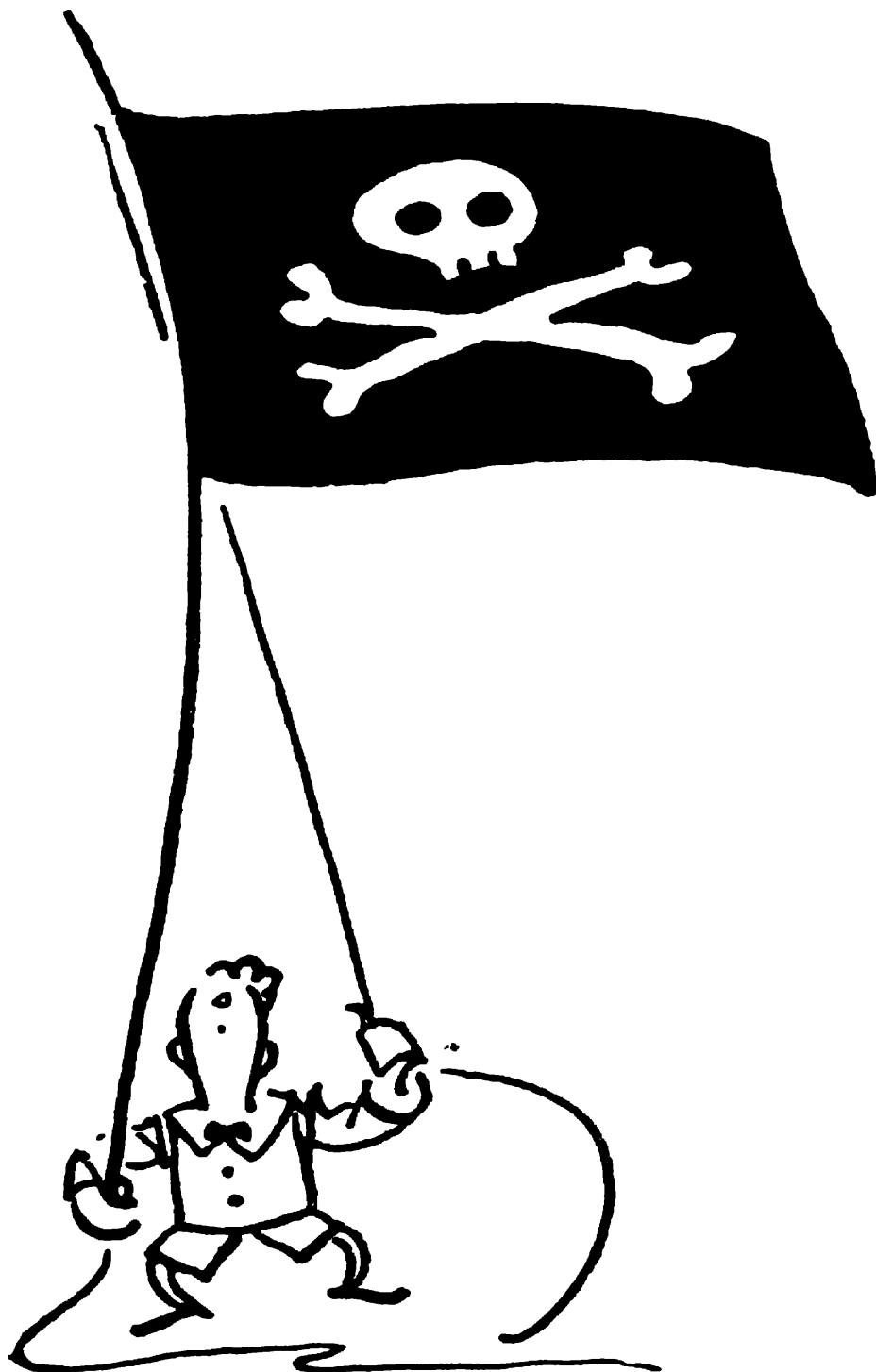
"But what *is* your surprise, Mauric ?"

"That was !" said he, as 'the Rolls backed into the main road.

She did not understand him. She did not even try, but later, when delivering some honey and eggs and a bowl of goldfish at Caroline Daren's bedside, she remarked :

"If that wasn't the hand of Providence, what was ?"

LITTLE GENTLEMAN



BOOTH TARKINGTON

BOOTH TARKINGTON was born at Indianapolis and educated at Princeton University. He made his reputation both here and in America with *Monsieur Beaucaire*, and added to it later by writing that delightful story of a very human boy, *Penrod*.

LITTLE GENTLEMAN

THE midsummer sun was stinging hot outside the little barber-shop next to the corner drug-store and Penrod, undergoing a toilette preliminary to his very slowly approaching twelfth birthday, was adhesive enough to retain upon his face much hair as it fell from the shears. There is a mystery here: the tonsorial processes are not unagreeable to manhood; in truth, they are soothing; but the hairs detached from a boy's head get into his eyes, his ears, his nose, his mouth, and down his neck, and he does everywhere itch excruciatingly. Wherefore he blinks, winks, weeps, twitches, condenses his countenance, and squirms, and perchance the barber's scissors clip more than intended—belike an out-lying flange of ear.

"Um—muh—*ow*!" said Penrod, this thing having happened.

"D' I touch y' up a little?" inquired the barber, smiling falsely.

"Ooh—*uh*!" The boy in the chair offered inarticulate protest, as the wound was rubbed with alum.

"*That* don't hurt!" said the barber. "You *will* get it, though, if you don't sit stiller," he continued, nipping in the bud any attempt on the part of his patient to think that he already had "it."

"Pfuff!" said Penrod, meaning no disrespect, but endeavouring to dislodge a temporary moustache from his lip.

"You ought to see how still that little Georgie Bassett sits," the barber went on, reprovably. "I hear everybody says he's the best boy in town."

"Pfuff! *Phirr*!" There was a touch of intentional contempt in this.

"I haven't heard nobody around the neighbourhood makin' no such remarks," added the barber, "about nobody of the name of Penrod Schofield."

"Well," said Penrod, clearing his mouth after a struggle, "who wants 'em to? Ouch!"

"I hear they call Georgie Bassett the 'little gentleman,'" ventured the barber, provocatively, meeting with instant success.

"They'd better not call *me* that," returned Penrod truculently. "I'd like to hear anybody try. Just once, that's all! I bet they'd never try it ag— Ouch!"

"Why? What'd you do to 'em?"

"It's all right what I'd *do*! I bet they wouldn't want to call me that again long as they lived!"

"What'd you do if it was a little girl? You wouldn't hit her, would you?"

"Well, I'd— Ouch!"

"You wouldn't hit a little girl, would you?" the barber persisted, gathering into his powerful fingers a mop of hair from the top of Penrod's head and pulling that suffering head into an unnatural position. "Doesn't the Bible say it ain't never right to hit the weak sex?"

"Ow! *Say*, look *out*!"

"So you'd go and punch a pore, weak, little girl, would you?" said the barber, reprovably.

"Well, who said I'd hit her?" demanded the chivalrous Penrod. "I bet I'd *fix* her though, all right. She'd see!"

"You wouldn't call her names, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't! What hurt is it to call anybody names?"

"Is that *so*!" exclaimed the barber. "Then you was intending what I heard you hollering at Fisher's grocery delivery wagon driver fer a favour, the other day when I was goin' by your house, was you? I reckon I better tell him, because he says to me *afterwards* if he ever lays eyes on you when you ain't in your own yard, he's goin' to do a whole lot o' things you ain't goin' to like! Yessir, that's what he says to *me*!"

"He better catch me first, I guess, before he talks so much."

"Well," resumed the barber, "that ain't sayin' what you'd do if a young lady ever walked up and called you a little gentleman. I want to hear what you'd do to her. I guess I know, though—come to think of it."

"What?" demanded Penrod.

"You'd sick that pore ole dog of yours on her cat, if she had one, I expect," guessed the barber derisively.

"No, I would not!"

"Well, what *would* you do?"

"I'd do enough. Don't worry about that!"

"Well, suppose it was a boy, then: what'd you do if a boy come up to you and says, 'Hello, little gentleman'?"

"He'd be lucky," said Penrod, with a sinister frown, "if he got home alive."

"Suppose it was a boy twice your size?"

"Just let him try," said Penrod ominously. "You just let him try. He'd never see daylight again; that's all!"

The barber dug ten active fingers into the helpless scalp before him and did his best to displace it, while the anguished Penrod, becoming instantly a seething crucible of emotion, misdirected his natural resentment into maddened brooding upon what he would do to a boy "twice his size" who should dare to call him "little gentleman." The barber shook him as his father had never shaken him; the barber buffeted him, rocked him frantically to and fro; the barber seemed to be trying to wring his neck; and Penrod saw himself in staggering zigzag pictures, destroying large, screaming, fragmentary boys who had insulted him.

The torture stopped suddenly; and clenched, weeping eyes began to see again, while the barber applied cooling lotions which made Penrod smell like a coloured housemaid's ideal.

"Now what," asked the barber, combing the reeking locks gently, "what would it make you so mad fer, to have somebody call you a little gentleman? It's a kind of compliment, as it were, you might say. What would you want to hit anybody fer *that* fer?"

To the mind of Penrod, this question was without meaning or reasonableness. It was within neither his power nor his desire to analyze the process by which the phrase had become offensive to him, and was now rapidly assuming the proportions of an outrage. He knew only that his gorge rose at the thought of it.

"You just let 'em try it!" he said threateningly, as he slid down from the chair. And as he went out of the door, after further conversation on the same subject, he called back those warning words once more: "Just let 'em try it! Just once—that's all I ask 'em to. They'll find out what they *get*!"

The barber chuckled. Then a fly lit on the barber's nose and he slapped at it, and the slap missed the fly but did not miss the nose. The barber was irritated. At this moment his birdlike eye gleamed a gleam as it fell upon customers approaching: the prettiest little girl in the world, leading by the hand her baby brother, Mitchy-Mitch, coming to have Mitchy-Mitch's hair clipped, against the heat.

It was a hot day and idle, with little to feed the mind—and the barber was a mischievous man with an irritated nose. He did his worst.

Meanwhile, the brooding Penrod pursued his homeward way; no great distance, but long enough for several one-sided conflicts with malign insulters made of thin air. "You better *not* call me that!" he muttered. "You just try it, and you'll get what other people got when *they* tried it. You better not ack fresh with *me*! Oh, you *will*, will you?" He delivered a vicious kick full upon the shins of an iron fence-post, which suffered little, though Penrod instantly regretted his indiscretion. "Oof!" he grunted, hopping; and went on after bestowing a look of awful hostility upon the fence-post. "I guess you'll know better next time," he said, in parting, to this antagonist. "You just let me catch you around here again and I'll—" His voice sank to inarticulate but ominous murmurings. He was in a dangerous mood.

Nearing home, however, his belligerent spirit was diverted to happier interests by the discovery that some workmen had left a caldron of tar in the cross-street, close by his father's stable. He tested it, but found it inedible. Also, as a substitute for professional chewing-gum it was unsatisfactory, being insufficiently boiled down and too thin, though of a pleasant, lukewarm temperature. But it had an excess of one quality—it was sticky. It was the stickiest tar Penrod had ever used for any purposes whatsoever, and nothing upon which he wiped his hands served to rid them of it; neither his polka-dotted shirt waist nor his knickerbockers: neither the fence, nor even Duke, who came unthinkingly wagging out to greet him, and retired wiser.

Nevertheless, tar is tar. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition; so Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighbouring yard could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground

about the caldron were scattered chips and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod mixed quantities of this refuse into the tar, and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the ebon surface.

Other surprises were arranged for the absent workmen. The caldron was almost full, and the surface of the tar near the rim. Penrod endeavoured to ascertain how many pebbles and brickbats, dropped in, would cause an overflow. Labouring heartily to this end, he had almost accomplished it, when he received the suggestion for an experiment on a much larger scale. Embedded at the corner of a grass-plot across the street was a whitewashed stone, the size of a small watermelon and serving no purpose whatever save the questionable one of decoration. It was easily pried up with a stick; though getting it to the caldron tested the full strength of the ardent labourer. Instructed to perform such a task, he would have sincerely maintained its impossibility; but now, as it was unbidden, and promised rather destructive results, he set about it with unconquerable energy, feeling certain that he would be rewarded with a mighty splash. Perspiring, grunting vehemently, his back aching and all muscles strained, he progressed in short stages until the big stone lay at the base of the caldron. He rested a moment, panting, then lifted the stone, and was bending his shoulders for the heave that would lift it over the rim, when a sweet, taunting voice, close behind him, startled him cruelly.

"How do you do, *little gentleman!*"

Penrod squawked, dropped the stone, and shouted, "Shut up, you dern fool!" purely from instinct, even before his about-face made him aware who had so spitefully addressed him.

It was Marjorie Jones. Always dainty, and prettily dressed, she was in speckless and starchy white to-day, and a refreshing picture she made, with the new-shorn and powerfully scented Mitchy-Mitch clinging to her hand. They had stolen up behind the toiler, and now stood laughing together in sweet merriment. Since the passing of Penrod's Rupe Collins period he had experienced some severe qualms at the recollection of his last meeting with Marjorie and his Apache behaviour; in truth, his heart instantly became as wax at sight of her, and he would have offered her fair speech;

but, alas! in Marjorie's wonderful eyes there shone a consciousness of new powers for his undoing, and she denied him opportunity.

"Oh, *oh!*" she cried, mocking his pained outcry. "What a way for a *little gentleman* to talk! Little gentlemen don't say wicked——"

"Marjorie!" Penrod, enraged and dismayed, felt himself stung beyond all endurance. Insult from her was bitterer to endure than from any other. "Don't you call me that again!"

"Why not, *little gentleman?*"

He stamped his foot. "You better stop!"

Marjorie sent into his furious face her lovely, spiteful laughter.

"Little gentleman, little gentleman, little gentleman!" she said deliberately. "How's the little gentleman, this afternoon? Hello, little gentleman!"

Penrod, quite beside himself, danced eccentrically. "Dry up!" he howled. "Dry up, dry up, dry up, dry *up!*"

Mitchy-Mitch shouted with delight and applied a finger to the side of the caldron—a finger immediately snatched away and wiped upon a handkerchief by his fastidious sister.

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch.

"You better look out!" Penrod whirled upon this small offender with grim satisfaction. Here was at least something male that could without dishonour be held responsible. "You say that again, and I'll give you the worst——"

"You will *not!*" snapped Marjorie, instantly vitriolic. "He'll say just whatever he wants to, and he'll say it just as *much* as he wants to. Say it again, Mitchy-Mitch!"

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch promptly.

"Ow-yah!" Penrod's tone-production was becoming affected by his mental condition. "You say that again, and I'll——"

"Go on, Mitchy-Mitch," cried Marjorie. "He can't do a thing. He don't *dare!* Say it some more, Mitchy-Mitch—say it a whole lot!"

Mitchy-Mitch, his small, fat face shining with confidence in his immunity, complied.

"'Ittle gellamun!" squeaked malevolently.

"'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun!"

The desperate Penrod bent over the whitewashed rock,

lifted it, and then—outdoing Porthos, John Ridd, and Ursus in one miraculous burst of strength—heaved it into the air.

Marjorie screamed.

But it was too late. The big stone descended into the precise midst of the caldron and Penrod got his mighty splash. It was far, far beyond his expectations.

Spontaneously there were grand and awful effects—volcanic spectacles of nightmare and eruption. A black sheet of eccentric shape rose out of the caldron and descended upon the three children, who had no time to evade it.

After it fell, Mitchy-Mitch, who stood nearest the caldron, was the thickest, though there was enough for all. Bre'r Rabbit would have fled from any of them.

When Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch got their breath, they used it vocally, and seldom have more penetrating sounds issued from human throats. Coincidentally, Marjorie, quite berserk, laid hands upon the largest stick within reach and fell upon Penrod with blind fury. He had the presence of mind to flee, and they went round and round the caldron, while Mitchy-Mitch feebly endeavoured to follow—his appearance, in this pursuit, being pathetically like that of a bug fished out of an ink-well, alive but discouraged.

Attracted by the riot, Samuel Williams made his appearance, vaulting a fence, and was immediately followed by Maurice Levy and Georgie Bassett. They stared incredulously at the extraordinary spectacle before them.

“Little GEN-TIL-MUN!” shrieked Marjorie, with a wild stroke that landed full upon Penrod’s tarry cap.

“Oooch!” bleated Penrod.

“It’s Penrod!” shouted Sam Williams, recognizing him by the voice. For an instant he had been in some doubt.

“Penrod Schofield!” exclaimed Georgie Bassett. “*What* does this mean?” That was Georgie’s style, and had helped to win him his title.

Marjorie leaned, panting, upon her stick. “I cu-called—uh—him—oh!” she sobbed—“I called him a lul-little—oh—gentelman! And oh—lul-look!—oh! lul-look at my du-dress! Lul-look at Mumitchy—oh—Mitch—oh!”

Unexpectedly, she smote again—with results—and then, seizing the indistinguishable hand of Mitchy-Mitch, she ran wailing homeward down the street.

"Little gentleman?" said Georgie Bassett, with some evidences of disturbed complacency. "Why, that's what they call *me*!"

"Yes, and you *are* one, too!" shouted the maddened Penrod. "But you better not let anybody call *me* that! I've stood enough around here for one day, and you can't run over *me*, Georgie Bassett. Just you put that in your gizzard and smoke it!"

"Anybody has a perfect right," said Georgie, with dignity, "to call a person a little gentleman. There's lots of names nobody ought to call, but this one's a *nice*——"

"You better look out!"

Unavenged bruises were distributed all over Penrod, both upon his body and upon his spirit. Driven by subtle forces, he had dipped his hands in catastrophe and disaster: it was not for a Georgie Bassett to beard him. Penrod was about to run amuck.

"I haven't called you a little gentleman, yet," said Georgie. "I only said it. Anybody's got a right to *say* it."

"Not around *me*! You just try it again and——"

"I shall say it," returned Georgie, "all I please. Anybody in this town has a right to *say* 'little gentleman'——"

Bellowing insanely, Penrod plunged his right hand into the caldron, rushed upon Georgie and made awful work of his hair and features.

Alas, it was but the beginning! Sam Williams and Maurice Levy screamed with delight, and, simultaneously infected, danced about the struggling pair, shouting frantically:

"Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Sick him, Georgie! Sick him, little gentleman! Little gentleman! Little gentleman!"

The infuriated outlaw turned upon them with blows and more tar, which gave Georgie Bassett his opportunity and later seriously impaired the purity of his fame. Feeling himself hopelessly tarred, he dipped both hands repeatedly into the caldron and applied his gatherings to Penrod. It was bringing coals to Newcastle, but it helped to assuage the just wrath of Georgie.

The four boys gave a fine imitation of the Laocoön group complicated by an extra figure—frantic splutterings and chokings, strange cries and stranger words issued from this tangle; hands dipped lavishly into the inexhaustible reservoir

of tar, with more and more picturesque results. The caldron had been elevated upon bricks and was not perfectly balanced; and under a heavy impact of the struggling group it lurched and went partly over, pouring forth a Stygian tide which formed a deep pool in the gutter.

It was the fate of Master Roderick Bitts, that exclusive and immaculate person, to make his appearance upon the chaotic scene at this juncture. All in the cool of a white "sailor suit," he turned aside from the path of duty—which led straight to the house of a maiden aunt—and paused to hop with joy upon the pavement. A repeated epithet, continuously half panted, half squawked, somewhere in the nest of gladiators, caught his ear, and he took it up excitedly, not knowing why.

"Little gentleman!" shouted Roderick, jumping up and down in childish glee. "Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Lit——"

A frightful figure tore itself free from the group, encircled this innocent bystander with a black arm, and hurled him headlong. Full length and flat on his face went Roderick into the Stygian pool. The frightful figure was Penrod. Instantly, the pack flung themselves upon him again, and, carrying them with him, he went over upon Roderick, who from that instant was as active a belligerent as any there.

Thus began the Great Tar Fight, the origin of which proved, afterward, so difficult for parents to trace, owing to the opposing accounts of the combatants. Marjorie said Penrod began it; Penrod said Mitchy-Mitch began it; Sam Williams said Georgie Bassett began it; Georgie and Maurice Levy said Penrod began it; Roderick Bitts, who had not recognized his first assailant, said Sam Williams began it.

Nobody thought of accusing the barber. But the barber did not begin it; it was the fly on the barber's nose that began it—though, of course, something else began the fly. Somehow, we never manage to hang the real offender.

The end came only with the arrival of Penrod's mother who had been having a painful conversation by telephone with Mrs. Jones, the mother of Marjorie, and came forth to seek an errant son. It is a mystery how she was able to pick out her own, for by the time she got there his voice was too hoarse to be recognizable.

Mr. Schofield's version of things was that Penrod was

insane. "He's a stark, raving lunatic!" declared the father, descending to the library from a before-dinner interview with the outlaw, that evening. "I'd send him to the military school, but I don't believe they'd take him. Do you know *why* he says all that awfulness happened?"

"When Margaret and I were trying to scrub him," responded Mrs. Schofield wearily, "he said 'everybody' had been calling him names."

"Names!" snorted her husband. "'Little gentleman!' *That's* the vile epithet they called him! And because of it he wrecks the peace of six homes!"

"*Sh!* Yes; he told us about it," said Mrs. Schofield, moaning. "He told us several hundred times, I should guess, though I didn't count. He's got it fixed in his head, and we couldn't get it out. All we could do was to put him in the closet. He'd have gone out again after those boys if we hadn't. I don't know *what* to make of him!"

"He's a mystery to *me*!" said her husband. "And he refuses to explain why he objects to being called 'little gentleman.' Says he'd do the same thing—and worse—if anybody dared to call him that again. He said if the President of the United States called him that he'd try to whip him. How long did you have him locked up in the closet?"

"*Sh!*" said Mrs. Schofield warningly. "About two hours; but I don't think it softened his spirit at all, because when I took him to the barber's to get his hair clipped again, on account of the tar in it, Sammy Williams and Maurice Levy were there for the same reason, and they just *whispered* 'little gentleman,' so low you could hardly hear them—and Penrod began fighting with them right before me, and it was really all the barber and I could do to drag him away from them. The barber was very kind about it, but Penrod——"

"I tell you he's a lunatic!" Mr. Schofield would have said the same thing of a Frenchman infuriated by the epithet "camel." The philosophy of insult needs expounding.

"*Sh!*" said Mrs. Schofield. "It does seem a kind of frenzy."

"Why on earth should any sane person mind being called——"

"*Sh!*" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's beyond me!"

"What are you *sh*-ing me for?" demanded Mr. Schofield explosively.

"*Sb!*" said Mrs. Schofield. "It's Mr. Kinosing, the new rector of Saint Joseph's."

"Where?"

"*Sb!*" On the front porch with Margaret; he's going to stay for dinner. I do hope——"

"Bachelor, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"*Our* old minister was speaking of him the other day," said Mr. Schofield, "and he didn't seem so terribly impressed."

"*Sb!* Yes; about thirty, and of course *so* superior to most of Margaret's friends—boys home from college. She thinks she likes young Robert Williams, I know—but he laughs so much! Of course there isn't any comparison. Mr. Kinosing talks so intellectually; it's a good thing for Margaret to hear that kind of thing, for a change—and, of course, he's very spiritual. He seems very much interested in her." She paused to muse. "I think Margaret likes him; he's so different, too. It's the third time he's dropped in this week, and I——"

"Well," said Mr. Schofield grimly, "if you and Margaret want him to come again, you'd better not let him see Penrod."

"But he's asked to see him; he seems interested in meeting all the family. And Penrod nearly always behaves fairly well at table." She paused, and then put to her husband a question referring to his interview with Penrod upstairs. "Did you—did you—do it?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "No, I didn't, but——" He was interrupted by a violent crash of china and metal in the kitchen, a shriek from Della, and the outrageous voice of Penrod. The well-informed Della, ill-inspired to set up for a wit, had ventured to address the scion of the house roguishly as "little gentleman", and Penrod, by means of the rapid elevation of his right foot, had removed from her supporting hands a laden tray. Both parents started for the kitchen, Mr. Schofield completing his interrupted sentence on the way.

"But I will, now!"

The rite thus promised was hastily but accurately performed in that apartment most distant from the front porch; and, twenty minutes later, Penrod descended to dinner. The Rev. Mr. Kinosing had asked for the pleasure of meeting

him, and it had been decided that the only course possible was to cover up the scandal for the present, and to offer an undisturbed and smiling family surface to the gaze of the visitor.

Scorched but not bowed, the smouldering Penrod was led forward for the social formulæ simultaneously with the somewhat bleak departure of Robert Williams, who took his guitar with him, this time, and went in forlorn unconsciousness of the powerful forces already set in secret motion to be his allies.

The punishment just undergone had but made the haughty and unyielding soul of Penrod more stalwart in revolt. He was unconquered. Every time the one intolerable insult had been offered him, his resentment had become the hotter, his vengeance the more instant and furious. And, still burning with outrage, but upheld by the conviction of right, he was determined to continue to the last drop of his blood the defence of his honour, whenever it should be assailed, no matter how mighty or august the powers that attacked it. In all ways, he was a very sore boy.

During the brief ceremony of presentation, his usually inscrutable countenance wore an expression interpreted by his father as one of insane obstinacy, while Mrs. Schofield found it an incentive to inward prayer. The fine graciousness of Mr. Kinosling, however, was unimpaired by the glare of virulent suspicion given him by this little brother: Mr. Kinosling mistook it for a natural curiosity concerning one who might possibly become, in time, a member of the family. He patted Penrod upon the head, which was, for many reasons, in no condition to be patted with any pleasure to the pattee. Penrod felt himself in the presence of a new enemy.

"How do you do, my little lad," said Mr. Kinosling. "I trust we shall become fast friends."

To the ear of his little lad, it seemed he said, "A trost we shall bick-home fawst friends." Mr. Kinosling's pronunciation was, in fact, slightly precious; and the little lad, simply mistaking it for some cryptic form of mockery of himself, assumed a manner and expression which argued so ill for the proposed friendship that Mrs. Schofield hastily interposed the suggestion of dinner, and the small procession went in to the dining-room.

"It has been a delicious day," said Mr. Kinosling, presently ; "warm but balmy." With a benevolent smile he addressed Penrod, who sat opposite him. "I suppose, little gentleman, you have been indulging in the usual outdoor sports of vacation?"

Penrod laid down his fork and glared, open-mouthed at Mr. Kinosling.

"You'll have another slice of breast of the chicken?" Mr. Schofield inquired, loudly and quickly.

"A lovely day!" exclaimed Margaret, with equal promptitude and emphasis. "Lovely, oh, lovely! Lovely!"

"Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" said Mrs. Schofield, and after a glance at Penrod which confirmed her impression that he intended to say something, she continued, "Yes, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!"

Penrod closed his mouth and sank back in his chair—and his relatives took breath.

Mr. Kinosling looked pleased. This responsive family, with its ready enthusiasm, made the kind of audience he liked. He passed a delicate, white hand gracefully over his tall, pale forehead, and smiled indulgently.

"Youth relaxes in summer," he said. "Boyhood is the age of relaxation; one is playful, light, free, unfettered. One runs and leaps and enjoys one's self with one's companions. It is good for the little lads to play with their friends; they jostle, push, and wrestle, and simulate little, happy struggles with one another in harmless conflict. The young muscles are toughening. It is good. Boyish chivalry develops, enlarges, expands. The young learn quickly, intuitively, spontaneously. They perceive the obligations of *noblesse oblige*. They begin to comprehend the necessity of caste and its requirements. They learn what birth means—ah—that is, they learn what it means to be well born. They learn courtesy in their games; they learn politeness, consideration for one another in their pastimes, amusements, lighter occupations. I make it my pleasure to join them often, for I sympathize with them in all their wholesome joys as well as in their little bothers and perplexities. I understand them, you see; and let me tell you it is no easy matter to understand the little lads and lassies." He sent to each listener his beaming glance, and, permitting it to come to rest upon Penrod, inquired:

"And what do you say to that, little gentleman?"

Mr. Schofield uttered a stentorian cough. "More? You'd better have some more chicken! More! Do!"

"More chicken!" urged Margaret simultaneously. "Do please! Please! More! Do! More!"

"Beautiful, beautiful," began Mrs. Schofield. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful——"

It is not known in what light Mr. Kinosling viewed the expression of Penrod's face. Perhaps he mistook it for awe; perhaps he received no impression at all of its extraordinary quality. He was a rather self-engrossed young man, just then engaged in a double occupation, for he not only talked, but supplied from his own consciousness a critical though favourable auditor as well, which of course kept him quite busy. Besides, it is oftener than is suspected the case that extremely peculiar expressions upon the countenances of boys are entirely overlooked, and suggest nothing to the minds of people staring straight at them. Certainly Penrod's expression—which, to the perception of his family, was perfectly horrible—caused not the faintest perturbation in the breast of Mr. Kinosling.

Mr. Kinosling waived the chicken, and continued to talk. "Yes, I think I may claim to understand boys," he said, smiling thoughtfully. "One has been a boy one's self. Ah, it is not all playtime! I hope our young scholar here does not overwork himself at his Latin, at his classics, as I did, so that at the age of eight years I was compelled to wear glasses. He must be careful not to strain the little eyes at his scholar's tasks, not to let the little shoulders grow round over his scholar's desk. Youth is golden; we should keep it golden, bright, glistening. Youth should frolic, should be sprightly; it should play its cricket, its tennis, its handball. It should run and leap; it should laugh, should sing madrigals and glees, carol with the lark, ring out in chanties, folk-songs, ballads, roundelays——"

He talked on. At any instant Mr. Schofield held himself ready to cough vehemently and shout, "More chicken," to drown out Penrod in case the fatal words again fell from those eloquent lips; and Mrs. Schofield and Margaret kept themselves prepared at all times to assist him. So passed a threatening meal, which Mrs. Schofield hurried, by every means within decency, to its conclusion. She felt that somehow

they would all be safer out in the dark of the front porch, and led the way thither as soon as possible.

"No cigar, I thank you." Mr. Kinosling, establishing himself in a wicker chair beside Margaret, waved away her father's proffer. "I do not smoke. I have never tasted tobacco in any form." Mrs. Schofield was confirmed in her opinion that this would be an ideal son-in-law. Mr. Schofield was not so sure.

"No," said Mr. Kinosling. "No tobacco for me. No cigar, no pipe, no cigarette, no cheroot. For me, a book—a volume of poems, perhaps. Verses, rhymes, lines metrical and cadenced—those are my dissipation. Tennyson by preference: 'Maud,' or 'Idylls of the King'—poetry of the sound Victorian days; there is none later. Or Longfellow will rest me in a tired hour. Yes, for me, a book, a volume in the hand, held lightly between the fingers."

Mr. Kinosling looked pleasantly at his fingers as he spoke, waving his hand in a curving gesture which brought it into the light of a window faintly illumined from the interior of the house. Then he passed those graceful fingers over his hair, and turned toward Penrod, who was perched upon the railing in a dark corner.

"The evening is touched with a slight coolness," said Mr. Kinosling. "Perhaps I may request the little gentleman——"

"B'gr-r-ruff!" coughed Mr. Schofield. "You'd better change your mind about a cigar."

"No, I thank you. I was about to request the lit——"

"Do try one," Margaret urged. "I'm sure papa's are nice ones. Do try——"

"No, I thank you. I remarked a slight coolness in the air, and my hat is in the hallway. I was about to request——"

"I'll get it for you," said Penrod suddenly.

"If you will be so good," said Mr. Kinosling. "It is a black bowler hat, little gentleman, and placed upon a table in the hall."

"I know where it is." Penrod entered the door, and a feeling of relief, mutually experienced, carried from one to another of his three relatives their interchanged congratulations that he had recovered his sanity.

"The day is done, and the darkness," began Mr. Kinosling—and recited that poem entire. He followed it with "The Children's Hour," and after a pause at the close, to allow his listeners time for a little reflection upon his rendition, he passed his hand again over his head, and called, in the direction of the doorway:

"I believe I will take my hat now, little gentleman."

"Here it is," said Penrod, unexpectedly climbing over the porch railing, in the other direction. His mother and father and Margaret had supposed him to be standing in the hallway out of deference, and because he thought it tactful not to interrupt the recitations. All of them remembered, later, that this supposed thoughtfulness on his part struck them as unnatural.

"Very good, little gentleman!" said Mr. Kinosling, and being somewhat chilled, placed the hat firmly upon his head, pulling it down as far as it would go. It had a pleasant warmth, which he noticed at once. The next instant, he noticed something else, a peculiar sensation of the scalp—a sensation which he was quite unable to define. He lifted his hand to take the hat off, and entered upon a strange experience: his hat seemed to have decided to remain where it was.

"Do you like Tennyson as much as Longfellow, Mr. Kinosling?" inquired Margaret.

"I—ah—I cannot say," he returned absently. "I—ah—each has his own—ugh! flavour and savour, each his—ah—ah——"

Struck by a strangeness in his tone, she peered at him curiously through the dusk. His outlines were indistinct, but she made out that his arms were uplifted in a singular gesture. He seemed to be wrenching at his head.

"Is—is anything the matter?" she asked anxiously. "Mr. Kinosling, are you ill?"

"Not at—ugh!—all," he replied, in the same odd tone. "I—ah—I believe—ugh!"

He dropped his hands from his hat, and rose. His manner was slightly agitated. "I fear I may have taken a trifling—ah—cold. I should—ah—perhaps be—ah—better at home. I will—ah—say good night."

At the steps, he instinctively lifted his hand to remove his hat, but did not do so, and, saying "Good night," again in a

frigid voice, departed with visible stiffness from that house, to return no more.

"Well, of all—!" cried Mrs. Schofield, astounded. "What was the matter? He just went—like that!" She made a flurried gesture. "In heaven's name, Margaret, what *did* you say to him?"

"I!" exclaimed Margaret indignantly. "Nothing! He just *went*!"

"Why, he didn't even take off his hat when he said good night!" said Mrs. Schofield.

Margaret, who had crossed to the doorway, caught the ghost of a whisper behind her, where stood Penrod.

"*You bet he didn't!*"

He knew not that he was overheard.

A frightful suspicion flashed through Margaret's mind—a suspicion that Mr. Kinosling's hat would have to be either boiled off or shaved off. With growing horror she recalled Penrod's long absence when he went to bring the hat.

"Penrod," she cried, "let me see your hands!"

She had toiled at those hands herself late that afternoon, nearly scalding her own, but at last achieving a lily purity.

"Let me see your hands!"

She seized them.

Again they were tarred.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DERBY DAY



ALBERT SMITH

ALBERT SMITH was trained as a doctor, but soon turned his powers of humorous observation to a good use as a contributor to *Punch*, and as a writer of plays and pantomimes. He published a large number of books, including *The Physiology of London Evening Parties*. He was the originator of the form of entertainment now known as the "travelogue."

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LAST DERBY DAY

(REPORTED WITHOUT HAVING BEEN TO THE RACE)

WE are by no means a sporting character. We never kept a racer ; we do not care a straw which horse wins or loses ; and have about as much idea of what is meant by the fluctuation of the odds in the sporting divisions of the newspapers as we have of playing upon the ophicleide—an instrument we could never bring ourselves to learn, for fear of some day tumbling into it and never being heard of again. Neither did we ever make a bet on the course higher than half a dozen pairs of gloves with some dark-eyed peri in lined muslin and *guirlandes Joséphine*, or a foolish half-crown at a roulette table—a very precarious chance in either case. We know as much of Tattersalls as Geoffrey Chaucer did of Musard's quadrilles ; and yet we always look forward to the Derby as one of the greatest treats in the whole twelve months.

With these sentiments, it may be conceived that we were not over-pleased at being compelled to stay in town on the last Derby Day—the more so, as we had already received several invitations ; and similar despatches to the following were continually dropping in :

No. I.

(Hurried writing, and no wafer ; brought by a little boy in buttons.)

Dear Al.

Will you have a go-in at a drag to Epsom ? It won't come to much—about £2 10s. each, including feed. We shall take something better than cape and gooseberry. Let's know soon ; and learn "The Monks of Old" and "The Irish Quadrilles" on your cornet.

Yours always,

Harry —

Lincoln's Inn.

This was refused, for obvious reasons hereafter stated. Besides, we know how these parties always end, where the charm of female society is wanted to check the exuberance of youthful spirits. We joined one some time back, of which our last reminiscence is that of endeavouring to cut up a cold fowl with the corkscrew, and drinking champagne out of a mustard-pot. We have a faint idea of leaving the course with a thousand other vehicles, all jostling along in one whirling cloud of dust and confusion, and disputing about a turnpike ticket—somewhere—and offering to decide the quarrel by the ancient ordeal of trial by battle with the toll-man; but this scene is as indistinct and evanescent as an unfixed daguerreotype.

No. II.

(Lace-work envelope, scented paper, medallion wafer, stamped with an unintelligible coat-of-arms, and small, formal, angular handwriting—a good specimen of “a style after six lessons”.)

Mrs. — is very happy in being able to offer Mr. S—— a seat in her landau to Epsom. Should he feel inclined to join her party, an early answer will oblige.

This was received, and also refused, on Tuesday morning. We were evidently pitched upon to fill up a sudden hiatus at the eleventh hour: besides, three very plain daughters, all single, and carrying flaring parasols all different—servants in gaudy liveries, who would have made capital harlequins if put into a kaleidoscope—nothing for lunch but warm sandwiches and flabby cucumber, peppered with dust—together with an air of intense *parvenu* dash flung over the whole set-out—all these combined were too much even for the sake of a cast to the Derby.

No. III.

(A dirty piece of paper, folded in that peculiar ingenious and intricate manner which only the inferior orders can contrive; closed with a common red wafer ornamented with five distinct impressions of the end of a watch-key.)

Hond sir i Take the librtty to Inform you of A wan as will start from My shop on Wensday for The Darby to epsm for a Sourin there And back and shall be onnord by your cumpny from your obedient and Humbil servent

John Higgs.

This was from our friend the greengrocer in the next street, and was gratefully declined, as was also the request from a neighbouring shopkeeper that we should inspect the celebrated six-and-sixpenny Derby blouse. But these were not all the inducements to go. A kind friend, who resides close to the Downs, actually offered us a bed before and after the race. Placards of "superior four-horse coaches to Epsom" stared at us from every office in London; all the railways, annihilating every idea of space, endeavoured, we know not how, to prove that some of their stations were near the course—we are not certain whether we were not told that the Eastern Counties was the best line to take; and all the world seemed wrapped up in the idea that the Queen would grace the course—which not proving true, was a remarkable instance of the Derby and the *hoax* taking place on the same day. We believe the joke to be original; if not, we humbly crave pardon for having introduced it.

To be candid, the plain truth of the matter was, we could not afford the trip. The season had been, up to the period in question, comparatively very expensive, and much more gaiety was yet to follow, which would make a great diminution in our exchequer, although we inhabit chambers on the fifth floor in a cheap inn (of court), and contrive occasionally, by dint of extreme caution, to make the same pair of white trousers appear two consecutive days in Regent Street. But our darling boots—the especial favourites with the bronze morocco tops and patent feet—had begun to evince the first symptoms of decline in the soles, brought on by over-waltzing. Moreover, the invincible stock, with the tiny bouquets embroidered thereon, seemed to have fallen out with our chin, unfortunately "like a stubble land at harvest-home," and was also on the decay; and a new black waistcoat of plain satin had been shot by some champagne, and tastefully ornamented with red spots, more palpable than pleasing, which rendered another absolutely necessary. We argued with ourselves a long time, which controversy is always

an obstinate one; and at last, reflecting that the money which we should kick down at the Derby would go a great way towards replacing these things, if it did not actually cover the expense, we decided *not to go*.

The instant we had come to this determination we assumed a calm resignation, which was almost supernatural, when the sacrifice which we had made is considered. This lasted until the evening before the day, and then our first discomforts began. We gradually became restless and uneasy, feeling as satisfied as a person who, upon principle alone, has given up attending a pleasant evening party "to go to bed early", and consequently lies awake until four in the morning, picturing to himself all the time what is going on at the *reunion* in question and listening to chimerical cornets-à-piston playing imaginary quadrilles, until every article on his washhand-stand appears to be having a dance to itself in derision.

We went to the theatre to help out the evening; and when it was over, not feeling tired, we entered one of the night-taverns to supper. It was Evans', and the room was crowded with sporting men—the two names "Coldrenick" and "Attila" perpetually ringing in our ears. This reminded us too keenly of our position, so we rushed away to the Cyder Cellars: here the same subject formed the only topic of conversation. It was the same at the Albion and the Coal-Hole—for in our nervous irritability we took supper at all—we do not think we ever bolted so many poached eggs in our life; and finally, when we dropped into the Wrekin, where the usual talk is unmixedly theatrical, we found the same two names still echoing in every corner of the room. We now gave up all ideas of distraction, and went moodily home to bed.

We are not an early riser; but on the Wednesday morning a villainous clock that hangs in our room, whose alarum has obstinately refused to ring for many months, went off by itself at five in the morning, and roused us from a troubled slumber. In our anger we seized a boot that was within reach, and with a good aim entirely stopped its proceedings—it will never ring more. Going to sleep again was out of the question. The morning was most lovely, and the bustle all over the house, even at that early hour, proved that the happy men who were going to Epsom had already commenced their preparations. Anon came an unwonted clatter of vehicles in the thoroughfare below; every instant a fresh pair of legs bounded up alternate

stairs ; and once in every ten minutes a knock was given at our door by one or other of the floors, to borrow a corkscrew, a clothes-brush, a wicker-covered tumbler, a pepper-castor, or something of the kind. These annoyances were brought to a climax at seven o'clock by the intrusion of a wretched boy, who insisted upon leaving a raised *pâté*, which, he said, we had ordered and paid for the day before at some pie-builder's in the Strand. We sent a boot-jack after him downstairs in extreme wrath ; forgetting at the moment that our own name being by no means exclusive or uncommon, there was a man on the ground-floor who revelled in the same felicitous cognomination.

That universal eccaleobion, the sun, had been hatching the countless events of the day into action for some hours—in plain terms, it was about ten o'clock—when we finished breakfast. By that time our neighbours had all departed, and a sense of overwhelming wretchedness stole over us. Robinson Crusoe on his uninhabited island, and the Ancient Mariner who shot the Albatross, in his lonely boat—Jacques Balmat, when he got to the top of Mont Blanc—and Sinbad the Sailor, when he got to the bottom of the Diamond Valley—Mr. Green, the aeronaut, up in a balloon at an altitude of twelve thousand feet—and Mr. Deane, the diver, amidst the sea-bound relics of the *Royal George*—Elizabeth Woodcock, when she was frozen in the snow—the only Sunday occupant of a Bow Street cell, having failed to obtain bail—a Gresham lecturer—the last man of the season—may all have their peculiar idea of solitude, but they were cheerful to our own loneliness. We were the left-behind of a pilgrim caravan—the locomotive oasis of a vast desert !

After walking up and down our room for about half an hour, in the manner of a caged panther at the Surrey Zoological Gardens during the fireworks from St. Angelo, we determined to sally forth into the streets ; and, mechanically following the sun, we bent our steps towards the West. Several carriages on their way to Epsom passed us ; we imagined their inmates looked upon us with pitying eyes, and perceived that we were completely within the rules of our own ill-temper. We felt almost ashamed of being seen, and we sought the retirement of by-courts and passages.

At the Regent Circus all was life and gaiety. The thoroughfare was literally blocked up with carriages about to start,

on nearly all of which we recognized an acquaintance, who bawled out in a satirical and insulting manner, "I suppose we shall see you on the Downs." One even pushed his cruelty so far as to inform us that we should find lobster-salad after the race at their drag on the hill. They went off and others arrived. We scarcely thought there were so many vehicles and horses in London as, until half-past twelve, collected between the County Fire Office and Carlton Chambers. At length the very last turn-out rolled away down Regent Street; it seemed to be the tie that bound us to the world. "The last links were broken"; and when we had followed it with our eyes until it diminished in the distance, and turned round the corner of Pall Mall, we could have cried for very despondency.

The Quadrant was deserted as we strolled up it. Here and there two or three persons in thick boots and badly cut strapless trousers, carrying dropsical umbrellas, were staring in at the shops; but these, and others of the same uninteresting class, constituted the sole occupants of the colonnade. We turned sulkily into one of the billiard-rooms for distraction. There was no clicking of balls as we ascended the stairs; the public *salle* was unoccupied, the marker amusing himself, as markers always do, with countless endeavours to perpetrate impossible cannons. Our apparition did not interfere with his pastime. It was evident that he thought nothing of a man who could coolly walk into a billiard-room at the same instant that the horses were exercising in the Warren—that we could be nobody worth caring for, or we should not be in London. He regarded us for a minute with a glance of mingled contempt and unconcern, then whistled part of "*Deb con te*", out of tune, made a red hazard, drank some beer from a pewter pot that stood on the mantelpiece, and continued his sport.

The *trottoir* of Regent Street was equally lonely. It presented nothing but a line of unrelieved hot pavement which blinded you to look at; over which, at certain intervals, a few individuals were endeavouring to strut their little hour in the absence of the usual dashing *flaneurs*, like the German company attempting Norma upon the stage, and with the same scenery and appointments that had whilom been graced by Adelaide Kemble and her vocal contemporaries.

We had heard a great deal about Catlin's American Indians—the Mandans, Ojibbeways, Stumickosucks, and other

euphonical tribes, and we determined upon paying them a visit at the Egyptian Hall, to carry on time. But the same unpleasantry pursued us—the exhibition had closed the day before, and there was nothing to be seen but a diagram of the Missouri Leviathan, and a notice that the room was to be let. As we turned away in sorrow, a Kew Bridge omnibus passed. Lucky idea ! We had a pretty cousin at a young ladies' establishment at Turnham Green, and we would pay her a visit. *C'est si gentil—d'avoir une belle cousine*, as Paul de Kock says : and, besides, perhaps we might see some of the other girls—who could tell ? We hailed the omnibus, and, after waiting at the White Horse Cellar until we had inspected all the perambulating manufactures there offered for sale, we proceeded on our journey, and were finally put down at the seminary.

After knocking twice at the door, hearing a bell ring inside, and seeing divers heads *en papillote* bob up over the front blinds, and then bob down again with most extraordinary celerity, we were allowed to enter, and were shown into a room that was the perfect picture of a school-parlour. There was a cabinet piano (not for the pupils), and a pair of globes ; some chalk copies of French heads ; a vase of dead flowers, in greenish water, on the table ; and some worsted ones in a paper-basket on the chiffonier, planted in a bung wrapped round with frizzled green paper ; straw spill-cases on the mantelpiece, and pasteboard card-racks at the sides, adorned with little square views of gentlemen's seats cut out of the last year's pocket-books and stuck on with gum. These things, together with a small table, on which were displayed a stuffed bird, two blown-glass ships, a guitar pin-cushion, and a pen-wiper made of little round bits of coloured cloth, with a transfer card-case, completed the garniture of the room—not to omit two grape-jars, painted green, and covered with birds cut from chintz bed-furniture. The mistress chanced to be engaged for a few minutes—schoolmistresses always are when you call—during which time we inspected the curiosities of the room ; listened to the jingling of the practising-piano through the wall, pitied the teacher, and then began to think what a god-send Bristol-board, perforated cards, and coloured floss-silk must have been to young ladies' establishments, until the mistress herself entered. Accumulation of despair ! We were informed that, pursuant to agreement, some friends had called for our cousin that very morning about ten o'clock, to take her

to Epsom ! We made a most ungainly *congé* to the lady, and, quitting the house, savagely stopped an omnibus on the high-road, and, violently forcing our way into the interior, travelled back to London. We then wandered—we cannot tell how, to Hungerford Market ; and, having looked at all the shrimps and periwinkles until we knew them by heart, we inspected the preparations for the footbridge, and then made a fourpenny tour to Vauxhall in the *Lightning* steamboat, returning in the *Thunder* by way of variety.

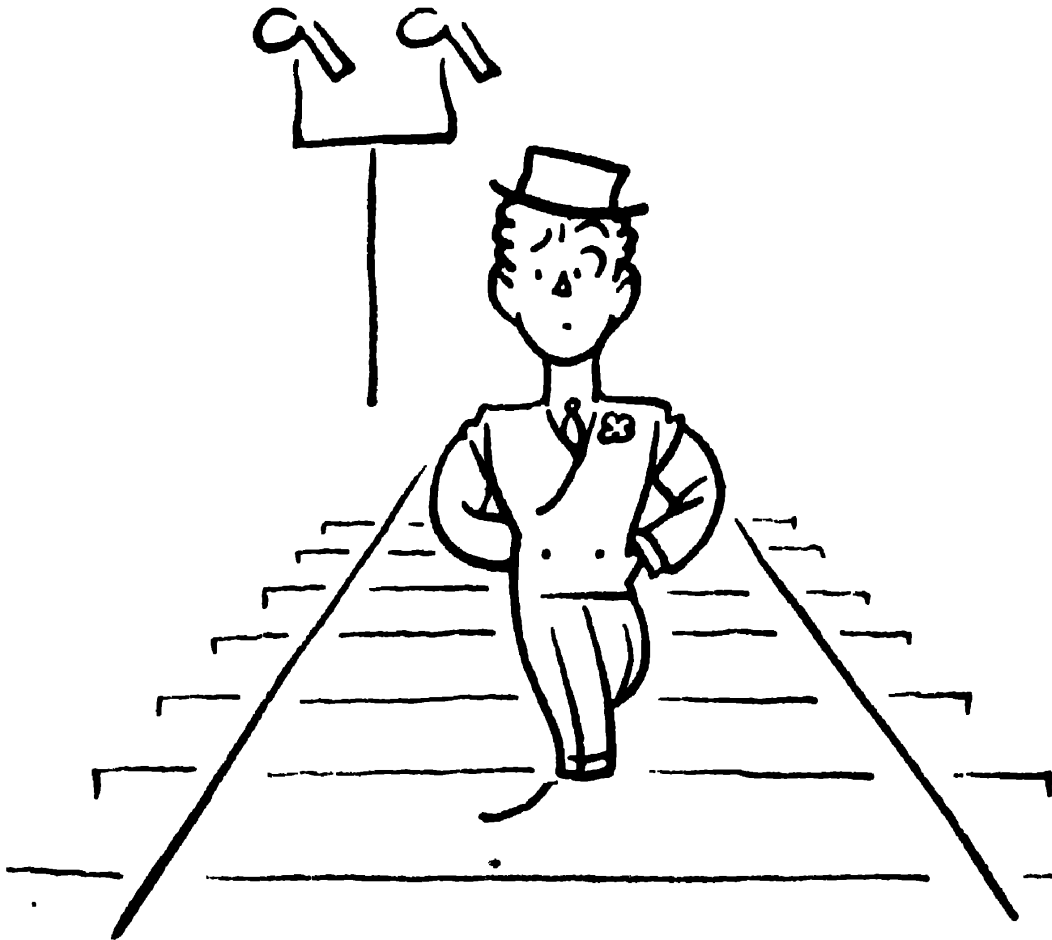
At last we found we were in the neighbourhood of some acquaintances who had been looking somewhat cold upon us lately, because we had not called to pay our respects so often as we might have done. Lucky idea again ! We would endeavour to wipe off the stain upon our character. We knocked at the door and awaited an answer. Two maid-servants looked out from the open window of a drawing-room next door ; a parrot swore at us from across the road ; and a head elevated itself from the area, and gazing at us for a moment disappeared again. It was quite plain that we were an object of curiosity in the street. But the knock remained unanswered, and we attacked the lion's head again, with an accompanying tug at the bell. After another delay an untidy woman opened the door about six inches, just enough to show us that the chain was up, and peering from the aperture inquired what we wanted. On answering the question by another—whether the mistress of the house was at home ?—we learnt that the whole party had “gone to Epsom,” servants and all, and that she, the cook, was the only one left in the house. We insinuated a card between the door and the post (which the woman received between her finger and thumb enveloped in her apron), and rushed despairingly away.

The longest day, however, will come to an end ; and evening at length arrived. We sauntered over to Kennington turnpike to see the crowds return ; and after waiting there an hour, a carriage full of friends drew up close to where we were standing, its progress being interrupted by the ticket-nuisance at the gate. There was a vacant place in the rumble, which, upon the invitation of the owner, we took possession of, heartily glad to have someone to speak to. We had barely taken our seat when another carriage drew up close to us—it was that of the people upon whom we had called during the day. One of the handsome girls of the family inquired how

we had liked the race. We were ashamed at the moment to confess that we had not been ; and, not thinking that we had called at the house, we told her it was charmingly run. These good folks have since sent out invitations for an evening party, and we are not asked ; we think they received our card on their return, and having imagined that we got somebody else to leave it, knowing that there was no chance of finding them at home.

Our other friends, on whose carriage we were, had all been winners, and were returning home in high spirits to a capital supper, to which they were good enough to request our company. But we steadfastly refused, and got down at Waterloo Bridge, feeling no inclination to join a party where all the conversation would necessarily turn upon an event which we knew nothing about. A comfortable repast in our own chambers did not put us in better humour, and we retired to bed at an early hour, after the dullest day we ever remember to have spent ; inwardly resolving never again to miss seeing the Derby run, even if we were compelled by circumstances to travel thither on the top of a ginger-beer cart.

UKRIDGE'S ACCIDENT SYNDICATE



P. G. WODEHOUSE

The creator of Psmith, Ukridge and above all the inimitable Jeeves needs no introduction. The name of P. G. WODEHOUSE spells loud and prolonged laughter throughout the English-speaking world. Here is one of the best tales from the great Ukridge saga.

UKRIDGE'S ACCIDENT SYNDICATE

"HALF a minute, laddie," said Ukridge. And, gripping my arm, he brought me to a halt on the outskirts of the little crowd which had collected about the church door.

It was a crowd such as may be seen any morning during the London mating-season outside any of the churches which nestle in the quiet squares between Hyde Park and the King's Road, Chelsea.

It consisted of five women of cook-like aspect, four nurse-maids, half a dozen men of the non-producing class who had torn themselves away for the moment from their normal task of propping up the wall of the "Bunch of Grapes" public-house on the corner, a costermonger with a barrow of vegetables, divers small boys, eleven dogs, and two or three purposeful-looking young fellows with cameras slung over their shoulders. It was plain that a wedding was in progress—and, arguing from the presence of the camera-men and the line of smart motor-cars along the kerb, a fairly fashionable wedding. What was not plain—to me—was why Ukridge, sternest of bachelors, had desired to add himself to the spectators.

"What," I inquired, "is the thought behind this? Why are we interrupting our walk to attend the obsequies of some perfect stranger?"

Ukridge did not reply for a moment. He seemed plunged in thought. Then he uttered a hollow, mirthless laugh—a dreadful sound like the last gargle of a dying moose.

"Perfect stranger, my number eleven foot!" he responded, in his coarse way. "Do you know who it is who's getting hitched up in there?"

"Who?"

"Teddy Weeks."

"Teddy Weeks? Teddy Weeks? Good Lord!" exclaimed. "Not really?"

And five years rolled away.

It was at Barolini's Italian restaurant in Beak Street that Ukridge evolved his great scheme. Barolini's was a favourite resort of our little group of earnest strugglers in the days when the philanthropic restaurateurs of Soho used to supply four courses and coffee for a shilling and sixpence; and there were present that night, besides Ukridge and myself, the following men-about-town: Teddy Weeks, the actor, fresh from a six weeks' tour with the Number Three *Only a Shop-Girl* Company; Victor Beamish, the artist, the man who drew that picture of the O-So-Eesi Piano-Player in the advertisement pages of the *Piccadilly Magazine*; Bertram Fox, author of *Ashes of Remorse*, and other unproduced motion-picture scenarios; and Robert Dunhill, who, being employed at a salary of eighty pounds per annum by the New Asiatic Bank, represented the sober, hard-headed commercial element. As usual, Teddy Weeks had collared the conversation, and was telling us once again how good he was and how hardly treated by a malignant fate.

There is no need to describe Teddy Weeks. Under another and a more euphonious name he has long since made his personal appearance, dreadfully familiar to all who read the illustrated weekly papers. He was then, as now, a sickeningly handsome young man, possessing precisely the same melting eyes, mobile mouth, and corrugated hair so esteemed by the theatre-going public today. And yet, at this period of his career, he was wasting himself on minor touring companies of the kind which open at Barrow-in-Furness and jump to Bootle for the second half of the week. He attributed this, as Ukridge was so apt to attribute his own difficulties, to lack of capital.

"I have everything," he said querulously, emphasizing his remarks with a coffee-spoon. "Looks, talent, personality, a beautiful speaking-voice—everything. All I need is a chance. And I can't get that because I have no clothes fit to wear. These managers are all the same, they never look below the surface, they never bother to find out if a man has genius. All they go by are his clothes. If I could afford to buy a couple of suits from a Cork Street tailor, if I could have my boots made to order by Moykoff instead of getting them ready-made and second-hand at Moses Brothers', if I could once contrive to own a decent hat, a really good pair of spats, and a gold

cigarette-case, all at the same time, I could walk into any manager's office in London and sign up for a West-end production tomorrow."

It was at this point that Freddie Lunt came in. Freddie, like Robert Dunhill, was a financial magnate in the making and an assiduous frequenter of Barolini's; and it suddenly occurred to us that a considerable time had passed since we had last seen him in the place. We inquired the reason for this aloofness.

"I've been in bed," said Freddie, "for over a fortnight."

The statement incurred Ukridge's stern disapproval. That great man made a practice of never rising before noon, and on one occasion, when a carelessly thrown match had burned a hole in his only pair of trousers, had gone so far as to remain between the sheets for forty-eight hours; but sloth on so majestic a scale as this shocked him.

"Lazy young devil," he commented severely. "Letting the golden hours of youth slip by like that when you ought to have been bustling about and making a name for yourself."

Freddie protested himself wronged by the imputation.

"I had an accident," he explained. "Fell off my bicycle and sprained an ankle."

"Tough luck," was our verdict.

"Oh, I don't know," said Freddie. "It wasn't bad fun getting a rest. And of course there was the fiver."

"What fiver?"

"I got a fiver from the *Weekly Cyclist* for getting my ankle sprained."

"You—*what*?" cried Ukridge, profoundly stirred—as ever—by a tale of easy money. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me that some dashed paper paid you five quid simply because you sprained your ankle? Pull yourself together, old horse. Things like that don't happen."

"It's quite true."

"Can you show me the fiver?"

"No; because if I did you would try to borrow it."

Ukridge ignored this slur in dignified silence.

"Would they pay a fiver to *anyone* who sprained his ankle?" he asked, sticking to the main point.

"Yes. If he was a subscriber."

"I knew there was a catch in it," said Ukridge moodily.

"Lots of weekly papers are starting this wheeze," proceeded

Freddie. "You pay a year's subscription and that entitles you to accident insurance."

We were interested. This was in the days before every daily paper in London was competing madly against its rivals in the matter of insurance and offering princely bribes to the citizens to make a fortune by breaking their necks. Nowadays papers are paying as high as two thousand pounds for a genuine corpse and five pounds a week for a mere dislocated spine ; but at that time the idea was new and it had an attractive appeal.

"How many of these rags are doing this ?" asked Ukridge. You could tell from the gleam in his eyes that that great brain was whirring like a dynamo. "As many as ten ?"

"Yes, I should think so. Quite ten."

"Then a fellow who subscribed to them all and then sprained his ankle would get fifty quid ?" said Ukridge, reasoning acutely.

"More if the injury was more serious," said Freddie, the expert. "They have a regular tariff. So much for a broken arm, so much for a broken leg, and so forth."

Ukridge's collar leaped off its stud and his pince-nez wobbled drunkenly as he turned to us.

"How much money can you blokes raise ?" he demanded.

"What do you want it for ?" asked Robert Dunhill, with a banker's caution.

"My dear old horse, can't you see ? Why, my gosh, I've got the idea of the century. Upon my Sam, this is the gilttest-edged scheme that was ever hatched. We'll get together enough money and take out a year's subscription for every one of these dashed papers."

"What's the good of that ?" said Dunhill, coldly unenthusiastic.

They train bank clerks to stifle emotion, so that they will be able to refuse overdrafts when they become managers. "The odds are we should none of us have an accident of any kind, and then the money would be chucked away."

"Good heavens, ass," snorted Ukridge, "you don't suppose I'm suggesting that we should leave it to chance, do you ? Listen ! Here's the scheme : We take out subscriptions for all these papers, then we draw lots, and the fellow who gets the fatal card or whatever it is goes out and breaks his leg and

draws the loot, and we split it up between us and live on it in luxury. It ought to run into hundreds of pounds."

A long silence followed. Then Dunhill spoke again. His was a solid rather than a nimble mind.

"Suppose he couldn't break his leg?"

"My gosh!" cried Ukridge, exasperated. "Here we are in the twentieth century, with every resource of modern civilization at our disposal, with opportunities for getting our legs broken opening about us on every side—and you ask a silly question like that! Of course he could break his leg. Any ass can break a leg. It's a little hard! We're all infernally broke—personally, unless Freddie can lend me a bit of that fiver till Saturday, I'm going to have a difficult job pulling through. We all need money like the dickens, and yet, when I point out this marvellous scheme for collecting a bit, instead of fawning on me for my ready intelligence you sit and make objections. It isn't the right spirit. It isn't the spirit that wins."

"If you're as hard up as that," objected Dunhill, "how are you going to put in your share of the pool?"

A pained, almost a stunned, look came into Ukridge's eyes. He gazed at Dunhill through his lop-sided pince-nez as one who speculates as to whether his hearing has deceived him.

"Me?" he cried. "Me? I like that! Upon my Sam, that's rich! Why, damme, if there's any justice in the world, if there's a spark of decency and good feeling in your bally bosoms, I should think you would let me in free for suggesting the idea. It's a little hard! I supply the brains and you want me to cough up cash as well. My gosh, I didn't expect this. This hurts me, by George! If anybody had told me that an old pal would——"

"Oh, all right," said Robert Dunhill. "All right, all right, all right. But I'll tell you one thing. If you draw the lot it'll be the happiest day of my life."

"I shan't," said Ukridge. "Something tells me that I shan't."

Nor did he. When, in a solemn silence broken only by the sound of a distant waiter quarrelling with the cook down a speaking-tube, we had completed the drawing, the man of destiny was Teddy Weeks.

I suppose that even in the springtime of Youth, when

broken limbs seem a lighter matter than they become later in life, it can never be an unmixedly agreeable thing to have to go out into the public highways and try to make an accident happen to one. In such circumstances the reflection that you are thereby benefiting your friends brings but slight balm. To Teddy Weeks it appeared to bring no balm at all. That he was experiencing a certain disinclination to sacrifice himself for the public good became more and more evident as the days went by and found him still intact. Ukridge, when he called upon me to discuss the matter, was visibly perturbed. He sank into a chair beside the table at which I was beginning my modest morning meal, and, having drunk half my coffee, sighed deeply.

"Upon my Sam," he moaned, "it's a little disheartening. I strain my brain to think up schemes for getting us all a bit of money just at the moment when we are all needing it most, and when I hit on what is probably the simplest and yet ripest notion of our time, this blighter Weeks goes and lets me down by shirking his plain duty. It's just my luck that a fellow like that should have drawn the lot. And the worst of it is, laddie, that, now we've started with him, we've got to keep on. We can't possibly raise enough money to pay yearly subscriptions for anybody else. It's Weeks or nobody."

"I suppose we must give him time."

"That's what he says," grunted Ukridge morosely, helping himself to toast. "He says he doesn't know how to start about it. To listen to him, you'd think that going and having a trifling accident was the sort of delicate and intricate job that required years of study and special preparation. Why, a child of six could do it on his head at five minutes' notice. The man's so infernally particular. You make helpful suggestions, and instead of accepting them in a broad, reasonable spirit of co-operation he comes back at you every time with some frivolous objection. He's so dashed fastidious. When we were out last night, we came on a couple of navvies scrapping. Good hefty fellows, either of them capable of putting him in hospital for a month. I told him to jump in and start separating them, and he said no ; it was a private dispute which was none of his business, and he didn't feel justified in interfering. Finicky, I call it. I tell you, laddie, this blighter is a broken reed. He has got cold feet. We did wrong to let

him into the drawing at all. We might have known that a fellow like that would never give results. No conscience. No sense of *esprit de corps*. No notion of putting himself out to the most trifling extent for the benefit of the community. Haven't you any more marmalade, laddie?"

"I have not."

"Then I'll be going," said Ukridge moodily. "I suppose," he added, pausing at the door, "you couldn't lend me five bob?"

"How did you guess?"

"Then I'll tell you what," said Ukridge, ever fair and reasonable; "you can stand me dinner tonight." He seemed cheered up for the moment by this happy compromise, but gloom descended on him again. His face clouded. "When I think," he said, "of all the money that's locked up in that poor faint-hearted fish, just waiting to be released, I could sob. Sob, laddie, like a little child. I never liked that man—he has a bad eye and waves his hair. Never trust a man who waves his hair, old horse."

Ukridge's pessimism was not confined to himself. By the end of a fortnight, nothing having happened to Teddy Weeks worse than a slight cold which he shook off in a couple of days, the general consensus of opinion among his apprehensive colleagues in the Syndicate was that the situation had become desperate. There were no signs whatever of any return on the vast capital which we had laid out, and meanwhile meals had to be bought, landladies paid, and a reasonable supply of tobacco acquired. It was a melancholy task in these circumstances to read one's paper of a morning.

All over the inhabited globe, so the well-informed sheet gave one to understand, every kind of accident was happening every day to practically everybody in existence except Teddy Weeks. Farmers in Minnesota were getting mixed up with reaping-machines; peasants in India were being bisected by crocodiles; iron girders from skyscrapers were falling hourly on the heads of citizens in every town from Philadelphia to San Francisco; and the only people who were not down with ptomaine poisoning were those who had walked over cliffs, driven motors into walls, tripped over manholes, or assumed on too slight evidence that the gun was not loaded. In a crippled world, it seemed, Teddy Weeks walked alone, whole and glowing with health. It was one of those grim, ironical,

hopeless, grey, despairful situations which the Russian novelists love to write about, and I could not find it in me to blame Ukridge for taking direct action in this crisis. My only regret was that bad luck caused so excellent a plan to miscarry.

My first intimation that he had been trying to hurry matters on came when he and I were walking along the King's Road one evening, and he drew me into Markham Square, a dismal backwater where he had once had rooms.

"What's the idea?" I asked, for I disliked the place.

"Teddy Weeks lives here," said Ukridge. "In my old rooms." I could not see that this lent any fascination to the place. Every day and in every way I was feeling sorrier and sorrier that I had been foolish enough to put money which I could ill spare into a venture which had all the earmarks of a wash-out, and my sentiments towards Teddy Weeks were cold and hostile.

"I want to inquire after him."

"Inquire after him? Why?"

"Well, the fact is, laddie, I have an idea that he has been bitten by a dog."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Ukridge dreamily. "I've just got the idea. You know how one gets ideas."

The mere contemplation of this beautiful event was so inspiring that for a while it held me silent. In each of the ten journals in which we had invested, dog-bites were specifically recommended as things which every subscriber ought to have. They came about half-way up the list of lucrative accidents, inferior to a broken rib or a fractured fibula, but better value than an ingrowing toe-nail. I was gloating happily over the picture conjured up by Ukridge's words when an exclamation brought me back with a start to the realities of life. A revolting sight met my eyes. Down the street came ambling the familiar figure of Teddy Weeks, and one glance at his elegant person was enough to tell us that our hopes had been built on sand. Not even a toy Pomeranian had chewed this man.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Teddy Weeks.

"Hallo!" we responded dully.

"Can't stop," said Teddy Weeks. "I've got to fetch a doctor."

"A doctor?"

"Yes. Poor Victor Beamish. He's been bitten by a dog."

Ukridge and I exchanged weary glances. It seemed as if Fate was going out of its way to have sport with us. What was the good of a dog biting Victor Beamish? What was the good of a hundred dogs biting Victor Beamish? A dog-bitten Victor Beamish had no market value whatever.

"You know that fierce brute that belongs to my landlady?" said Teddy Weeks. "The one that always dashes out into the area and barks at people who come to the front door?" I remembered. A large mongrel with wild eyes and flashing fangs, badly in need of a haircut. I had encountered it once in the street, when visiting Ukridge, and only the presence of the latter, who knew it well and to whom all dogs were as brothers, had saved me from the doom of Victor Beamish. "Somehow or other he got into my bedroom this evening. He was waiting there when I came home. I had brought Beamish back with me, and the animal pinned him by the leg the moment I opened the door."

"Why didn't he pin you?" asked Ukridge, aggrieved.

"What I can't make out," said Teddy Weeks, "is how on earth the brute came to be in my room. Somebody must have put him there. The whole thing is very mysterious."

"Why didn't he pin you?" demanded Ukridge again.

"Oh, I managed to climb on to the top of the wardrobe while he was biting Beamish," said Teddy Weeks. "And then the landlady came and took him away. But I can't stop here talking. I must go and get that doctor."

We gazed after him in silence as he tripped down the street. We noted the careful manner in which he paused at the corner to eye the traffic before crossing the road, the wary way in which he drew back to allow a truck to rattle past.

"You heard that?" said Ukridge tensely. "He climbed on to the top of the wardrobe!"

"Yes."

"And you saw the way he dodged that excellent truck?"

"Yes."

"Something's got to be done," said Ukridge firmly. "The man has got to be awakened to a sense of his responsibilities."

Next day a deputation waited on Teddy Weeks.

Ukridge was our spokesman, and he came to the point with admirable directness.

"How about it?" asked Ukridge.

"How about what?" replied Teddy Weeks nervously, avoiding his accusing eye.

"When do we get action?"

"Oh, you mean that accident business?"

"Yes."

"I've been thinking about that," said Teddy Weeks.

Ukridge drew the mackintosh which he wore indoors and out of doors and in all weathers more closely around him. There was in the action something suggestive of a member of the Roman Senate about to denounce an enemy of the State. In just such a manner must Cicero have swished his toga as he took a deep breath preparatory to assailing Clodius. He toyed for a moment with the ginger-beer wire which held his pince-nez in place, and endeavoured without success to button his collar at the back. In moments of emotion Ukridge's collar always took on a sort of temperamental jumpiness which no stud could restrain.

"And about time you *were* thinking about it," he boomed sternly.

We shifted appreciatively in our seats, all except Victor Beamish, who had declined a chair and was standing by the mantelpiece. "Upon my Sam, it's about time you were thinking about it. Do you realize that we've invested an enormous sum of money in you on the distinct understanding that we could rely on you to do your duty and get immediate results? Are we to be forced to the conclusion that you are so yellow and few in the pod as to want to evade your honourable obligations? We thought better of you, Weeks. Upon my Sam, we thought better of you. We took you for a two-fisted, enterprising, big-souled, one hundred-per-cent he-man who would stand by his friends to the finish."

"Yes, but——"

"Any bloke with a sense of loyalty and an appreciation of what it means to the rest of us would have rushed out and found some means of fulfilling his duty long ago. You don't even grasp at the opportunities that come your way. Only yesterday I saw you draw back when a single step into the road would have had a truck bumping into you."

"Well, it's not so easy to let a truck bump into you."

"Nonsense. It only requires a little ordinary resolution. Use your imagination, man. Try to think that a child has

fallen down in the street—a little golden-haired child,” said Ukridge, deeply affected. “And a dashed great cab or something comes rolling up. The kid’s mother is standing on the pavement, helpless, her hands clasped in agony. ‘Dammit,’ she cries, ‘will no one save my darling?’ ‘Yes, by George,’ you shout, ‘I will.’ And out you jump and the thing’s over in half a second. I don’t know what you’re making such a fuss about.”

“Yes, but——” said Teddy Weeks.

“I’m told, what’s more, it isn’t a bit painful. A sort of dull shock, that’s all.”

“Who told you that?”

“I forget. Someone.”

“Well, you can tell him from me that he’s an ass,” said Teddy Weeks, with asperity.

“All right. If you object to being run over by a truck there are lots of other ways. But, upon my Sam, it’s pretty hopeless suggesting them. You seem to have no enterprise at all. Yesterday, after I went to all the trouble to put a dog in your room, a dog which would have done all the work for you—all that you had to do was stand still and let him use his own judgment—what happened? You climbed on to——”

Victor Beamish interrupted, speaking in a voice husky with emotion.

“Was it you who put that damned dog in the room?”

“Eh?” said Ukridge. “Why, yes. But we can have a good talk about all that later on,” he proceeded hastily. “The point at the moment is how the dickens we’re going to persuade this poor worm to collect our insurance money for us. Why, damme, I should have thought you would have——”

“All I can say——” began Victor Beamish heatedly.

“Yes, yes,” said Ukridge; “some other time. Must stick to business now, laddie. I was saying,” he resumed, “that I should have thought you would have been as keen as mustard to put the job through for your own sake. You’re always beefing that you haven’t any clothes to impress managers with. Think of all you can buy with your share of the swag once you have summoned up a little ordinary determination and seen the thing through. Think of the suits, the boots, the hats, the spats. You’re always talking

about your dashed career, and how all you need to land you in a West-end production is good clothes. Well, here's your chance to get them."

His eloquence was not wasted. A wistful look came into Teddy Weeks's eye, such a look as must have come into the eye of Moses on the summit of Pisgah. He breathed heavily. You could see that the man was mentally walking along Cork Street, weighing the merits of one famous tailor against another.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said suddenly. "It's no use asking me to put this thing through in cold blood. I simply can't do it. I haven't the nerve. But if you fellows will give me a dinner tonight with lots of champagne I think it will key me up to it."

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Champagne! The word was like a knell.

"How on earth are we going to afford champagne?" said Victor Beamish.

"Well, there it is," said Teddy Weeks. "Take it or leave it."

"Gentlemen," said Ukridge, "it would seem that the company requires more capital. How about it, old horses? Let's get together in a frank, business-like cards-on-the-table spirit, and see what can be done. I can raise ten bob."

"What!" cried the entire assembled company, amazed. "How?"

"I'll pawn a banjo."

"You haven't got a banjo."

"No, but George Tupper has, and I know where he keeps it."

Started in this spirited way, the subscriptions came pouring in. I contributed a cigarette-case, Bertram Fox thought his landlady would let him owe for another week, Robert Dunhill had an uncle in Kensington who, he fancied, if tactfully approached, would be good for a quid, and Victor Beamish said that if the advertisement-manager of the O-So-Eesi Piano-Player was churlish enough to refuse an advance of five shillings against future work he misjudged him sadly. Within a few minutes, in short, the Lightning Drive had produced the impressive total of two pounds six shillings, and we asked Teddy Weeks if he thought that he could get adequately keyed up within the limits of that sum.

"I'll try," said Teddy Weeks.

So, not unmindful of the fact that that excellent hostelry supplied champagne at eight shillings the quart bottle, we fixed the meeting for seven o'clock at Barolini's.

Considered as a social affair, Teddy Weeks's keying-up dinner was not a success. Almost from the start I think we all found it trying. It was not so much the fact that he was drinking deeply at Barolini's eight-shilling champagne while we, from lack of funds, were compelled to confine ourselves to meaner beverages; what really marred the pleasantness of the function was the extraordinary effect the stuff had on Teddy. What was actually in the champagne supplied to Barolini and purveyed by him to the public, such as were reckless enough to drink it, at eight shillings the bottle remains a secret between its maker and his Maker; but three glasses of it were enough to convert Teddy Weeks from a mild and rather oily young man into a truculent swashbuckler.

He quarrelled with us all. With the soup he was tilting at Victor Beamish's theories of Art; the fish found him ridiculing Bertram Fox's views on the future of the motion-picture; and by the time the leg of chicken with dandelion salad arrived—or, as some held, string salad; opinions varied on this point—the hell-brew had so wrought on him that he had begun to lecture Ukridge on this mis-spent life and was urging him in accents audible across the street to go out and get a job and thus acquire sufficient self-respect to enable him to look himself in the face in a mirror without wincing. Not, added Teddy Weeks with what we all thought uncalled-for offensiveness, that any amount of self-respect was likely to do that. Having said which, he called imperiously for another eight bobs' worth.

We gazed at one another wanly. However excellent the end towards which all this was tending, there was no denying that it was hard to bear. But policy kept us silent. We recognized that this was Teddy Weeks's evening and that he must be humoured. Victor Beamish said meekly that Teddy had cleared up a lot of points which had been troubling him for a long time. Bertram Fox agreed that there was much in what Teddy had said about the future of the close-up. And even Ukridge, though his haughty soul was seared to its foundations by the latter's personal remarks, promised to take his homily to heart and act upon it at the earliest possible moment.

"You'd better!" said Teddy Weeks belligerently, biting off the end of one of Barolini's best cigars. "And there's another thing—don't let me hear of your coming and sneaking people's socks again."

"Very well, laddie," said Ukridge humbly.

"If there is one person in the world that I despise," said Teddy, bending a red-eyed gaze on the offender, "it's a snock-seeker—a seek-snocker—a—well, you know what I mean."

We hastened to assure him that we knew what he meant, and he relapsed into a lengthy stupor, from which he emerged three-quarters of an hour later to announce that he didn't know what we intended to do, but that he was going. We said that we were going too, and we paid the bill and did so.

Teddy Weeks's indignation on discovering us gathered about him upon the pavement outside the restaurant was intense, and he expressed it freely. Among other things, he said—which was not true—that he had a reputation to keep up in Soho.

"It's all right, Teddy, old horse," said Ukridge soothingly. "We just thought you would like to have all your old pals round you when you did it."

"Did it? Did what?"

"Why, had the accident."

Teddy Weeks glared at him truculently. Then his mood seemed to change abruptly, and he burst into a loud and hearty laugh.

"Well, of all the silly ideas!" he cried amusedly. "I'm not going to have an accident. You don't suppose I ever seriously intended to have an accident, do you? It was just my fun." Then, with another sudden change of mood, he seemed to become a victim to an acute unhappiness. He stroked Ukridge's arm affectionately, and a tear rolled down his cheek. "Just my fun," he repeated. "You don't mind my fun, do you?" he asked pleadingly. "You like my fun, don't you? All my fun. Never meant to have an accident at all. Just wanted dinner." The gay humour of it all overcame his sorrow once more. "Funniest thing ever heard," he said cordially. "Didn't want accident, wanted dinner. Dinner daxident, danner dixident," he added, driving home his point. "Well, good night all," he said cheerily—and, stepping off the

kerb on to a banana-skin, was instantly knocked ten feet by a passing lorry.

"Two ribs and an arm," said the doctor five minutes later, superintending the removal proceedings. "Gently with that stretcher."

It was two weeks before we were informed by the authorities of Charing Cross Hospital that the patient was in a condition to receive visitors. A whip-round secured the price of a basket of fruit, and Ukridge and I were deputed by the shareholders to deliver it with their compliments and kind inquiries.

"Hallo!" we said in a hushed, bedside manner when finally admitted to his presence.

"Sit down, gentlemen," replied the invalid.

I must confess even in that first moment to having experienced a slight feeling of surprise. It was not like Teddy Weeks to call us gentlemen. Ukridge, however, seemed to notice nothing amiss.

"Well, well, well," he said buoyantly. "And how are you, laddie? We've brought you a few fragments of fruit."

"I am getting along capitally," replied Teddy Weeks, still in that odd precise way which had made his opening words strike me as curious. "And I should like to say that in my opinion England has reason to be proud of the alertness and enterprise of her great journals. The excellence of their reading-matter, the ingenuity of their various competitions, and, above all, the go-ahead spirit which has resulted in this accident insurance scheme are beyond praise. Have you got that down?" he inquired.

Ukridge and I looked at each other. We had been told that Teddy was practically normal again, but this sounded like delirium.

"Have we got that down, old horse?" asked Ukridge gently.

Teddy Weeks seemed surprised.

"Aren't you reporters?"

"How do you mean, reporters?"

"I thought you had come from one of these weekly papers that have been paying me insurance money, to interview me," said Teddy Weeks.

Ukridge and I exchanged another glance. An uneasy

glance this time. I think that already a grim foreboding had begun to cast its shadow over us.

"Surely you remember me, Teddy, old horse?" said Utridge anxiously.

Teddy Weeks knit his brow, concentrating painfully.

"Why, of course," he said at last. "You're Utridge, aren't you?"

"That's right. Utridge."

"Of course. Utridge."

"Yes. Utridge. Funny your forgetting me!"

"Yes," said Teddy Weeks. "It's the effect of the shock I got when that thing bowled me over. I must have been struck on the head, I suppose. It has had the effect of rendering my memory rather uncertain. The doctors here are very interested. They say it is a most unusual case. I can remember some things perfectly, but in some ways my memory is a complete blank."

"Oh, but I say, old horse," quavered Utridge, "I suppose you haven't forgotten about that insurance, have you?"

"Oh no. I remember that."

Utridge breathed a relieved sigh.

"I was a subscriber to a number of weekly papers," went on Teddy Weeks. "They are paying me insurance money now."

"Yes, yes, old horse," cried Utridge. "But what I mean is you remember the Syndicate, don't you?"

Teddy Weeks raised his eyebrows.

"Syndicate? What Syndicate?"

"Why, when we all got together and put up the money to pay for the subscriptions to these papers and drew lots, to choose which of us should go out and have an accident and collect the money. And you drew it, don't you remember?"

Utter astonishment, and a shocked astonishment at that, spread itself over Teddy Weeks's countenance. The man seemed outraged.

"I certainly remember nothing of the kind," he said severely. "I cannot imagine myself for a moment consenting to become a party to what from your own account would appear to have been a criminal conspiracy to obtain money under false pretences from a number of weekly papers."

"But, laddie——"

"However," said Teddy Weeks, "if there is any truth in this story, no doubt you have documentary evidence to support it."

Ukridge looked at me. I looked at Ukridge. There was a long silence.

"Shift-ho, old horse?" said Ukridge sadly. "No use staying on here."

"No," I replied with equal gloom. "May as well go."

"Glad to have seen you," said Teddy Weeks, "and thanks for the fruit."

The next time I saw the man he was coming out of a manager's office in the Haymarket. He had on a new Homburg hat of a delicate pearl grey, spats to match, and a new blue flannel suit, beautifully cut, with an invisible red twill. He was looking jubilant, and as I passed him, he drew from his pocket a gold cigarette-case.

It was shortly after that, if you remember, that he made a big hit as the juvenile lead in that piece at the Apollo and started on his sensational career as a *matinée* idol.

Inside the church the organ had swelled into the familiar music of the Wedding March. A verger came out and opened the doors. The five cooks ceased their reminiscences of other and smarter weddings at which they had participated. The camera-men unshipped their cameras. The costermonger moved his barrow of vegetables a pace forward. A dishevelled and unshaven man at my side uttered a disapproving growl.

"Idle rich!" said the dishevelled man.

Out of the church came a beauteous being, leading attached to his arm another being, somewhat less beauteous.

There was no denying the spectacular effect of Teddy Weeks. He was handsomer than ever. His sleek hair, gorgeously waved, shone in the sun; his eyes were large and bright; his lissome frame, garbed in faultless morning-coat and trousers, was that of an Apollo. But his bride gave the impression that Teddy had married money. They paused in the doorway, and the camera-men became active and fussy.

"Have you got a shilling, laddie?" said Ukridge in a low, level voice.

"Why do you want a shilling?"

"Old horse," said Ukridge tensely, "it is of the utmost vital importance that I have a shilling here and now."

I passed it over. Ukridge turned to the dishevelled man,

and I perceived that he held in his hand a large rich tomato of juicy and over-ripe appearance.

"Would you like to earn a bob?" Ukridge said.

"Would I!" replied the dishevelled man.

Ukridge sank his voice to a hoarse whisper.

The camera-men had finished their preparations. Teddy Weeks, his head thrown back in that gallant way which has endeared him to so many female hearts, was exhibiting his celebrated teeth. The cooks, in undertones, were making adverse comments on the appearance of the bride.

"Now, please," said one of the camera-men.

Over the heads of the crowd, well and truly aimed, whizzed a large juicy tomato. It burst like a shell full between Teddy Weeks's expressive eyes, obliterating them in scarlet ruin. It spattered Teddy Weeks's collar, it dripped on Teddy Weeks's morning-coat. And the dishevelled man turned abruptly and raced off down the street.

Ukridge grasped my arm. There was a look of deep content in his eyes.

"Shift-ho?" said Ukridge.

Arm-in-arm we strolled off in the pleasant June sunshine.

THE PRINCE'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT



ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG (the pen-name of Captain A. A. WILLIS, R.E.) was a regular contributor to *Punch* for several years, and has written five historical romances, a number of humorous novels, and a series of thrillers. His play *Ten Minute Alibi* was recently produced with striking success.

THE PRINCE'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT

ONCE upon a time there was a King and he had a son who was very, very clever. In fact, he was so smart that the shopkeepers would only accept cash. And he had had to take to Patience because none of the courtiers would play cards with him.

Well, one day, when Prince Pointedface and his father were discussing affairs of State, there was a sort of flash, and a fairy appeared between them. They were not startled at all, because fairies had a habit of travelling about like that. The King merely changed the subject in a polite fashion and remarked that it was a fine day for appearing.

"Yes, very fine day for it," agreed the fairy. "Let me see," she went on, getting to business right away, "the Prince comes of age in a week's time, doesn't he?"

"He does!" answered the old King, who knew all about that; for his son had been making a good thing out of it for the last two months.

"Well," said the fairy, turning to the young man, "I've got a birthday present for you now, as I did not attend the customary fairy gathering round your cradle."

"Oh, that didn't really matter!" said the Prince, in a self-satisfied tone. "The others gave me all the usual presents, Health, and Wealth, and Long Life, and Happiness——"

"Quite, quite," interrupted the fairy. "I was down to have given you Good Looks. But if you're satisfied——"

The Prince gave a start and glanced sideways at a mirror. He considered that remark a nasty dig.

"Well, of course," he began, "if you'd like——"

"Oh, it's too late to do anything about it *now*," went on the fairy, scoring all along the line. "Much," she added, looking more closely at him.

The old King coughed meaningly at this point. It seemed to him the conversation was taking rather a personal tone.

"Well, what are you going to give me?" demanded Prince Pointedface, changing the subject with some alacrity.

"I am going to grant you three wishes."

"Oh, *that*!" replied the Prince in a bored fashion—as if he had been offered a silver-plated toast-rack.

"Don't say '*that*' like that!" said the fairy crossly. "It's a very nice present."

"Quite, quite. Very nice," again interrupted the King rather anxiously. "Say 'Thank you', my boy!"

"Can I wish for anything I like?" asked the Prince, becoming slightly interested.

"Anything."

"And you promise you'll grant it?"

"Of course," snapped the fairy, getting annoyed.

"You're sure you'll be able to?" continued Prince Pointedface suspiciously.

The fairy snorted indignantly—if fairies do that sort of thing. "Look here," she began. "You shan't have them if you're going——"

"Sorry, sorry! No offence," hurriedly apologized the Prince. "Well, my first wish is to have a Wunk."

The fairy, who had raised her wand in readiness, lowered it again.

"A *what*?" she said. "I don't think I quite caught it."

"A Wunk," said the Prince, who was a young man of original ideas.

"A Wunk?" repeated the fairy, taken aback. "Wunk! Wunk!" She paused thoughtfully. "Wunk! What's it like?"

"Well, that's what I've often wondered," replied the Prince amiably.

"Wouldn't you prefer a guinea-pig, my boy?" put in the old King anxiously. "The stables are rather full at the moment——"

"No, I want a Wunk. I've never had one."

"Is there such a thing?" asked the fairy.

"I shouldn't think so," replied the Prince happily, "but there will be soon, won't there; because you promised you'd grant——"

"Oh, all right," replied the fairy testily, and, raising her wand once more, she shut her eyes. Then she opened them again.

"Would you mind repeating the word?" she asked.

"Wunk," said the Prince.

"How do you spell it?"

"W-u-n-k."

"Er—thanks," said the fairy, and shut her eyes once more. After some thought she waved her wand in a dubious fashion.

A thing like a six-legged porcupine with a rabbit's head appeared in front of the King, who started violently.

"Bother! That's not it," said the fairy, and hastily abolished it.

"I'm sure a guinea-pig would be better," quavered the King in a faint voice.

The fairy with wrinkled brow lifted her wand once more. "It's by no means easy," she observed severely as she shut her eyes, only to open them again after a long pause and remark: "This really ought to count two wishes!"

The Prince merely laughed rather nastily, and the fairy, having given him a lofty stare, shut her eyes once more and waved her wand.

A creature, with the head of a pelican and the body of a sea-lion standing on the long legs of an ostrich, was suddenly between them.

The King, trembling violently, rang a bell for the Royal Valet and ordered a large beaker of wine.

"I *think* that's a Wunk," said the fairy with a sigh not unmixed with pride.

Prince Pointedface surveyed the apparition from every angle.

"I think it must be," he admitted at last. "It certainly isn't anything else."

The fairy put a few finishing touches to the Wunk in the shape of a pair of eagle's wings.

"Yes, I'm certain it's a Wunk," she said at last, "though I've never been asked for one before."

"I hope, my boy," put in the King severely—he was feeling better after the wine—"that you'll look after its—er—feeding and so on yourself. By the way, what does it eat?"

"Er—— What does it?" queried the Prince, turning to its creator.

"Don't ask *me*!" snapped the fairy. "*You* wished for it!"

At this point the Wunk nearly solved the question by a nasty snap of its beak. Apparently Royal Valet was its favourite dish.

"I don't think I like it!" said the Prince, drawing back a hurried pace. "In fact," he added, "I wish I hadn't asked for it."

Like a flash the fairy waved her wand and the Wunk was not.

"You haven't," she observed. "And that's your second wish, by the way," she added malevolently. "Come on, now. Only one more." She was beginning to dislike Prince Pointedface.

"Oh, is that so?" said Prince Pointedface, who didn't like being hustled.

"That is so."

"Sez you!"

"Sez me!" snapped the fairy. "Come on, hurry up!"

"And no more Wunks, my boy," added the King.

Prince Pointedface looked very cunning.

"Are you ready, then?" he said as the fairy poised her wand. "Well, then, I wish for three more wishes."

"Hey! That's not fair," cried the King indignantly, as the fairy stood speechless with surprise.

"Oh, and why not?" coldly demanded the Prince.

"It's not done, my boy. It's never been done. Your grandfather and your great-grandfather would never have done such a thing; though they both had dealings with fairies. In fact, I myself once, when walking through a Magic Wood——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the Prince, who had heard the one about the Magic Wood many times before.

"You—you can't do that," flamed the fairy, finding her voice and losing her temper.

"Even apart from your promise," began Prince Pointedface in judicial tones, "which many would consider morally binding, I presume my action is quite legal? But shall we consult the Vizier?"

Choking with wrath, the fairy waved her wand.

"There!" she screeched, in too much of a temper to see the further possibilities of the business. "Now hurry up and have your next three wishes. But I'll never give you a present again."

"Only two wishes," pleasantly corrected the Prince, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "My third wish of this series will, of course, be for three more."

"My boy, my boy," said the King, horror and admiration struggling together in his voice. "How you remind me of your dear mother! Her idea of honesty was——"

"I think," interrupted the Prince to the practically speechless fairy, "it was very nice of me not to have wished for more than three. In fact, now I come to think of it, the first of my new wishes will be for fifty more wishes to be granted."

The fairy found her voice and said things about Prince Pointedface that ought never to have been mentioned by a lady. She stamped up and down and spoke so angrily and rapidly that the old King, whose wife had only died a short while before, timidly said, "Yes, m'dear," on at least two occasions from sheer force of habit.

In the end the fairy with one last blast of venom cried: "And have all the rest of the wishes you want—I promise you'll get 'em all right—and may you enjoy them—but not if I can help it, you mean little——"

The rest of the sentence, since she disappeared in an angry puff of smoke, was finished in fairyland, where no doubt it caused a bit of a sensation.

The King and his son were silent for some while after she had gone. Silence, in fact, seemed rather nice. Then the Prince, a bit shaken, said: "Well, you know, I rather wish I'd consulted the Vizier before I did that!"

"But you did," replied the King. "You called him in just before your third wish, and he told you it was quite possible but inadvisable."

"Why, so I did," said the Prince in surprise. "I'd forgotten. No, I hadn't. I say, Father: that was a wish and it was *granted*."

"What was a wish, my boy?" asked the poor old King, rather puzzled.

"My saying just now I wished I'd consulted the Vizier. I can see I shall have to be careful." And he went out thoughtfully.

Many times that day did the Prince realize he had to be careful. For the fairy, it seemed, by way of revenge, hung on his lightest word, and if it could be called a wish granted it in as awkward a manner as possible. For instance, when he mentioned quite casually at lunch, thinking of the crops, that he wished it would rain—rain it did, a regular

downpour right inside the Banqueting Hall, and all the Court got wet through and most of the food was spoilt, before the astounded Prince realized what had happened and thought of turning it off. Everybody looked so angry about it that the Prince, much shaken, incautiously wished himself elsewhere ; but, having omitted in his confusion to specify any destination, he at once found himself, still wearing his best clothes, in the worst part of the Royal Piggeries.

By the end of a couple of days the Court in general was unanimous in condemning the Prince's new gift ; for they soon realized it affected them in no small measure. The stout Court Chamberlain, in particular, was very bitter, after finding himself translated from the Throne Room to a distant wood where the Prince was hunting, merely because His Highness had expressed a cheery desire that "that old pudding of a Court Chamberlain could be with them, as it might reduce his fat a bit". So swiftly did the fairy work that the Chamberlain arrived in time to hear nearly the whole of the Prince's remarks, which did not make for good feeling.

In addition to this liability to unexpected displacement occasioned by the Prince's ill-advised small talk, the courtiers found life in the Palace still more hazardous because of the presence of strange animals, which, like the Wunk, Prince Pointedface had created out of curiosity, and had forgotten to annihilate. In fact, a Blue-Rumped Gnurgle was at large in the maids' bedrooms for several days, till the Royal Housekeeper respectfully asked for the Prince to wish it elsewhere. The Prince, who was busy, sent it to one or two places where it wasn't in the least wanted, before he eventually demolished it. And then there was the Jellyhock, which the Prince manufactured to enliven family prayers.

The weather, too, developed an amazing variety owing to the incautious Prince Pointedface's conversational remarks on the subject, nor was it by any means confined to the outside of the Palace. As like as not a depression advancing over Iceland one minute would be in the drawing-room the next. One bold courtier ventured to complain about this, but on the Prince's remarking "I wish you'd shut up", he had shut up—in the manner of a concertina, and the Prince's first attempt at reconstruction, by wishing he'd open out again, could hardly be called a success. He got him right eventually, but the young man was never the same afterwards.

But the climax came when at a Royal Ball the Prince, in conversation with a young lady he had not met before and rather fancied, gallantly though inadvertently expressed a wish to see more of her. Since the ballroom was crowded at the time, there was rather a scandal, which was not helped by the Prince losing his head and expending several wishes in blankets and safety-pins before he finally translated the hysterical damsel to her bedroom. This incident led to the appointment of a Censor of the Royal Wish, whose business it was to follow Prince Pointedface everywhere and nudge him whenever he said "I wish . . ." so that he might fully consider every aspect of his intended remark.

Under this functionary's guidance the Prince started an Account Book of Receipt and Expenditure of Wishes to ensure his keeping a balance in hand. It was a most interesting document, and began something like this :

WISH ACCOUNT BOOK			
<i>Credit</i>		<i>Debit</i>	
From Fairy	3	To 1 Wunk	1
„ Self	3	„ Demobilization of above	1
„ Self	50	„ 3 more wishes	1
„ Self	1000	„ 50 more wishes	1
„ Self	2000	„ Consultation with Vizier (antedated)	1
		„ Weather control	2
		„ Inadvertent visit to Piggeries and consequent new suit of clothes	2
		„ Collar-stud forgotten	1
		„ Attendance of Chamberlain during Hunt and return ticket	2
		„ Recruitment and disbandment of Assorted Fauna	22
		„ Shutting up of courtier and subsequent reconstruction	5
		„ Jellyhock at family prayers	1
		„ Removal of same (various destinations and final despatch)	5
		„ Good view of dance partner	1
		„ One blanket	1
		„ One larger blanket	1
		„ Safety-pins	3
		„ Further weather control	7

and so on.

What would eventually have happened in the Court no one knows. The old King said it was far more disorganizing than the last visit of his mother-in-law, who at the time was suffering from a spell which caused her to turn everything she touched into vanilla ice-cream. Nor did there appear any way out of it, since the Prince, in a moment of enthusiasm, one day had increased his capital to several millions.

But the end came at last, for the vindictive fairy was still on the watch. The Prince, after a very successful half-hour during which he got his favourite Patience out three times running, laughed triumphantly, and then rashly exclaimed, "I wish I could have that half-hour over again!"

And there the fairy had him. He had the half-hour over again complete in every detail, even down to his triumphant laugh and the rash exclamation, which in its turn started off a third similar half-hour, and that a fourth. . . .

They took him off after a while to a quiet room in a far wing of the Palace, and there he still is. The Court Mathematician has computed to the relief of all that his existing store of wishes will last him out.

BIFFIN ON THE BASSOON



HARRY GRAHAM

HARRY GRAHAM was formerly an officer in the Coldstream Guards, and since retiring from the Army has made a great name for himself as a writer of light verse and humorous stories, including the inimitable *Ratbless Rhymes*. He has also written the lyrics for *The Maid of the Mountains* and other successful plays.

BIFFIN ON THE BASSOON

IF there is one thing in the world that annoys me more than another, it is to be told that the English are an unmusical people.

I was dining with Reginald Biffin at the Grillroom Club, a few years ago, when he happened to express a somewhat unfavourable opinion of the music-loving qualities of my fellow-countrymen. That very afternoon, he said, he had attended a concert at which an admirable Russian tenor had sung no less than forty-eight songs by Brahms. The audience had consisted of only twenty-six persons. Seven of these were hospital nurses and had therefore in all probability not paid for their seats. He described the gathering as typically representative.

"Nonsense!" I protested indignantly. "You don't know what you're talking about. Give the British public the goods," I continued, "and you'll be surprised to see how they'll clamour for more!"

"I'll be surprised all right," he answered.

"Take Gilbert and Sullivan——" I began.

"Oh, Sullivan——" he interrupted scornfully.

"I know exactly what you're going to say," I told him. "You're going to say that Sullivan and Wagner are the two composers who appeal especially to the tone-deaf, to the unmusical."

"And to the musical, too," he protested.

"Of course. But that's not the point."

"Then what *is* the point?" he asked.

"I don't know now," I said. "You will interrupt so; I've forgotten where I was."

"You were trying to pretend that the British public is fond of music."

"*Good* music, yes."

"They somehow manage to survive fairly comfortably

without it," he suggested. "You don't find them clamouring very loudly for National Opera, for a State Orchestra, for——"

"All the old arguments!" I groaned. "My dear chap, there are more amateur choral and orchestral societies in England today than——"

It was Biffin's turn to interrupt.

"I was referring to *good* music," he said. "I know, of course, that in the summer months our public parks are enriched by the presence of Council Bands playing the overture to 'Poet and Peasant' or 'Zampa'. I am aware that no seaside esplanade is considered complete without a bandstand on which the Borough Orchestra's performance of Tschaikovsky's '1812' drowns the roaring of the elements. I know——"

"You keep on saying that you *know*," I chipped in, "but as a matter of fact, where music is concerned you know nothing."

"I know nothing!" he repeated scornfully. "That's very funny! Ha! Ha!" He gave a mirthless laugh.

"Well, what *do* you know?" I said.

"It would take me too long to tell you," he replied. "But perhaps it may alter your views a bit to hear a rather remarkable story which deals with my musical experiences. Would you care to listen to it?"

"Whether I care to listen or no is a matter of minor importance," I said. "You're my host, you're paying for the dinner, and you're obviously determined that I shall. So I suppose I shall have to."

"Charles," he called to a passing waiter, "bring some more coffee."

"That's right," I said. "We must keep awake at all costs. Now then," I added, when our wants had been supplied, "fire away! And let's get your rather remarkable story over before I think of a better one."

You must know then (he began) that from earliest youth I have always been particularly musical. At the age of three I could play the treble part of "Chopsticks" with considerable accuracy. At six my rendering of "The Merry Peasant" suggested that as an infant prodigy I might take my place on any concert platform without fear of serious competition.

I'm not boasting when I say that as a child I was deservedly

recognized as being a bit of a genius. Musical talent is hereditary in our family. It's in the blood. My ancestors were all more or less music addicts. Why, I remember a picture we had in the dining-room at home of my grandmother playing the harp. Not a very good picture artistically, but of considerable interest from a psychological point of view. She had very beautiful arms, had my grandmother, and in those days young women didn't get the chances they now enjoy of displaying their attractions. The harp was a perfect godsend to girls with pretty wrists. I'm wandering from the point, I know, but what I mean to suggest is that if you could have seen my grandmother, as she was in that picture, plucking the strings with long white fingers, her left foot on the clutch (so to speak) and her right on the accelerator, working the gears for all she was worth, you'd realize at once where I got my talent from. But of course you never will see her now, because if she were alive today she'd be a hundred and twenty-five and her interest in the harp would probably have waned.

My father was musical, too. He had a remarkable voice, quite untrained of course, but very powerful. I used to hear him singing in his bath every morning. "So We'll Go No More a Roving!" and "Oh, That We Two Were Maying!" were his favourite songs, and the regular splashing of his sponge showed how admirable was his sense of rhythm.

The bathroom at home was renowned for the excellence of its acoustic properties. Sometimes when my father was giving a particularly lifelike performance of "The Death of Nelson" the whole house would shake with his vocal reverberations. The servants would come rushing upstairs with slop-pails, thinking that he was drowning himself or something. As a matter of fact, of course, he never was, and they would return to the basement, relieved, if perhaps slightly resentful.

My dear mother was not a singer, though she was very fond of humming to herself as she went about her household duties. Sounds of "There is a Green Hill Far Away" issuing from the linen cupboard—she was particularly devoted to hymns—would often reveal her exact whereabouts. "I don't know anything about music," she would say, "but I know what I like", and that summed up her whole attitude towards this particular branch of art.

She and my father started a sort of amateur glee-party, composed chiefly of the family, which met in the billiard-room once a week and practised part-songs. My two elder sisters sang soprano, and in those days I had a fine treble voice, verging on falsetto. It was always difficult to find a suitable tenor, my Uncle William (who tried to fill the part) labouring under the disability of never having learnt to read music. He sang exclusively by ear, but made up in enthusiasm for what he lacked of technical skill, often with very original results. Two male cousins sang bass more loudly than bass has ever probably been sung before, while a faint bee-like droning that issued from a corner by the window suggested that my mother was taking the alto part, and from the wild cries that rose from the sofa by the fire-place we knew that the sopranos were putting up a good fight against almost overwhelming odds.

We lived in Hampstead then, and at Christmas-time would often don black masks and go round to the various houses in the neighbourhood, singing carols and collecting money for charities. I must confess that this practice did not commend itself to all the local inhabitants. I remember the Cohens, next door, showing considerable annoyance at being aroused from sleep at 2 a.m. by the sounds of "Christians, Awake"! Again, when we sang "Noel! Noel!" further up the street, an old gentleman named Joel came rushing out in his night-shirt under the impression that he was being summoned.

Anyhow, I've told you enough to show that we were a decidedly musical family, and you'll understand how it was that when I went to a public school I found it difficult to keep my talents as dark as I should have wished. At school, naturally, a boy is very apt to be kicked if he displays signs of playing the piano better than he plays football, and I did my best to hide my guilty secret from the other boys.

One morning, however, when I had brought my fag-master some buttered eggs that I had inadvertently dropped in the passage on the way—they were otherwise all right, and to outward appearance at any rate seemed quite normal—"Hey, young feller," he said, giving me a playful kick on the shin, which from a youth of his eminence might be regarded as a mark of especial favour, "did I hear you playing the flute the other day?"

"No." I was able quite truthfully to deny any connection

with that instrument. "It was only the penny whistle," I explained.

"The School Orchestra's short of players," he went on. "And I've promised old Posner"—Dr. Rollo Posner was our music-master—"to try and chevy up a few recruits. You cut along to the Drill Hall at six o'clock tonight and report to Sergeant Basley, see?"

As I turned to go he gave me another flattering buffet. "Next time I have buttered eggs," he said, disentangling a few short carpet hairs from the dish, "remember, I prefer them *bald*!"

That evening, as instructed, I reported myself at the Drill Hall, where I found old Dr. Posner and Sergeant Basley, his second-in-command, inspecting an embarrassed group of small boys who, like myself, had been selected to swell the ranks of the Orchestral Society.

"Well, my boy," said Dr. Posner, when it became my turn to be examined, "how would you like to join the orchestra, eh?"

I replied that I thought perhaps it wouldn't be so jolly rotten.

"Ever played any instrument?" he asked.

"No, sir. Only the penny whistle."

"Ah, indeed. The penny whistle. And were you an accomplished performer upon that peculiar——"

"Oh no, sir," I protested. "I could manage 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow', and a bit of the 'Dead March'."

"A varied if not extensive repertory!"

He turned to Sergeant Basley.

"What do *you* think, Basley?"

"His mouth's not the right shape," said the Sergeant, shaking his head gloomily.

"For the clarinet, no," said Dr. Posner, "but what about the bassoon?"

"No harm in trying, sir."

"There doesn't seem to be anybody else."

"That's right, sir."

The music-master turned to me.

"Would you care to learn the bassoon?" he inquired.

"I'd rather play the drum, sir."

"Nonsense!" He laughed good-naturedly. "Besides, there's a waiting list for the drum a mile long already. No.

It's bassoon or nothing. That's settled then. Good evening. See you tomorrow at rehearsal."

Thus it came about that, under the supervision of Dr. Posner and the personal tuition of Sergeant Basley, I learnt to play that most curious and much-maligned instrument, the bassoon, and in due course took my place without discredit in the school orchestra.

Sergeant Basley was in some ways a man of mystery. The title of sergeant was his only by courtesy; as his long hair and round shoulders betokened, he had never seen military service. But he was a gallant little man and an exceptionally talented musician. There was practically no instrument that he could not master, and it was due to his untiring efforts that the orchestra was able to perform with considerable success at the end-of-term concerts to which the boys' parents looked forward with so much anxiety.

As Sergeant Basley explained it to me, the bassoon is not an instrument that any person would be likely to adopt wantonly, inadvisedly or indeed of his own free will. Bassoon playing is, in fact, as much an hereditary profession as is that of the miner, the undertaker, or the chimney-sweep. Bassoons are regarded as heirlooms, and handed down from father to son in the various families that have specialized for generations in this particular form of musical expression. Basley was, so he assured me, a bassoonist by birth rather than by adoption. His grandfather had played the bassoon in a famous military band in the early 'eighties. Tales of his father's prowess on this instrument were still being circulated at the Musicians' Club when King George came to the throne. He himself was destined to attain a very high reputation in the woodwind world. Indeed, his aid was anxiously solicited whenever any piece was to be performed necessitating solo work from that instrument which is still somewhat unjustly regarded as the buffoon of the orchestra.

It is doubtless true to say of the bassoon that one of its chief characteristics is the ability it possesses to provide comic relief. Sir Arthur Sullivan used it to good effect for this purpose, and even the modern music-hall comedian can still rely upon it to supply him with a certain laugh when all other methods fail. This is perhaps one of the reasons why bassoonists wear an expression of habitually furtive bonhomie, and are privileged to appear in public in black evening ties

on occasions when their colleagues are forced to wear white ones.

The great English poets themselves have been unable to invest the bassoon with any truly romantic spirit. When Coleridge's wedding guest heard its loud tones, he could only beat his breast, a gesture that has never been regarded as a sign of real appreciation. And Tennyson, with that lack of worldly knowledge for which he was distinguished, naïvely suggested that, in conjunction with a violin and a flute—a truly remarkable trio—the bassoon could provide a band to which Maud and her guests might perform the peculiar feat of dancing "in tune".

Under the admirable instruction of Sergeant Basley, I gradually acquired a certain proficiency as a bassoonist. The sounds that I emitted became daily less painfully goatlike, and a glorious hour arrived when I was given no less than sixteen solo bars in a symphony entitled "Harvesting Time", composed by the great Dr. Posner himself, which was performed at the school concert with marked success.

"Harvesting Time" was in many respects a peculiar work. One movement, I remember, was devoted entirely to a portrayal of farmyard life, where the introduction of what was known as the "cow" motif on the bassoon was among the happier touches. Later on in the symphony my instrument was called upon to provide a suggestion of bees among the lime trees which was no less felicitous, and in the final *Allegro* movement I did some fine contrapuntal work round an old theme that Dr. Posner had stolen bodily from a traditional Nordic folk-song of the sixteenth century.

Dr. Posner was not ashamed of being a plagiarist. As he justly remarked, when we remember that three compositions so widely dissimilar as "Faust", "Elijah", and "Sonnie Boy" owe much of their popularity to a certain musical phrase common to all of them, we shall hardly blame the minor modern composers for their half-conscious borrowings.

"Harvesting Time" has not stood the test of time, and it must frankly be stated that Dr. Posner was never a great composer. It was rather as an expert on the celeste that he eventually gained a well-earned knighthood.

During rehearsals for the school concert, I became so enthusiastic a player that in the summer holidays I persuaded my father to make me a present of a secondhand bassoon

that I had noticed languishing in the window of a musical instrument shop in Wardour Street. My interest, alas, evaporated after I left school; the bassoon was relegated to a boxroom cupboard, and I might never have given it another thought had I not happened to run up against my old friend Sergeant Basley not long ago in Oxford Street.

I recognized him at once, for he had changed but little in twenty years, and was carrying a familiar black shiny instrument-case in which I knew his beloved bassoon to be reposing. He was hurrying along towards Langham Place, when I stopped him.

"You don't remember me, Sergeant Basley," I said. "And yet wasn't I your favourite pupil?"

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed, searching feverishly in his memory. A sudden gleam of recognition lit his eye.

"Fancy meeting you!" he said. "This is a surprise."

"It's a small world!"

"That's right!"

"Where are you rushing off to like this?" I asked.

"Rehearsal," he replied. "The Philmelodic's giving its last concert on Tuesday. You've probably read about it in the papers. Perhaps you're coming to it?"

"I wish I was. What are you giving? Not 'Harvesting Time', I hope."

"No," he laughed. "All the same it's a big 'do', I can tell you. We're playing the new symphony by Heinzmacher."

"Something terribly modern, eh?"

"For the first time in England. The composer's come over from Dresden on purpose to conduct."

"No chance of *my* getting in, I suppose?"

"Funny you should say that," he replied. "By a bit of luck I happen to have a couple of complimentary seats in my pocket. I was thinking of giving them to my old mother, but I'd sooner you had them."

"No, no. Her need is greater than mine, I'm sure."

"Not a bit of it," said Basley. "She's stone deaf, to begin with, and hates music. She only comes because she likes to see me play."

"Are you sure you can spare them?"

"That's right."

He produced an envelope from his pocket.

"Here you are," he said. "Not the best places, I'm

afraid. At the side of the orchestra, just behind the double-basses. But you'll get a fine view of Herr Heinzmacher himself."

"If you insist," I said, grasping the tickets firmly before he should change his mind. "I'm frightfully obliged. Eight o'clock, I suppose? At the King's Hall."

"That's right."

"Thanks awfully. But I mustn't keep you from rehearsal."

"That's right. Old Heinzmacher's got a devil of a temper. Good-bye. See you Tuesday!"

He turned and scuttled off down the street.

I was naturally delighted at getting two free seats for a concert which, as I had read in the papers, was likely to prove one of the outstanding events of the London musical season. I cast about in my mind for a suitable companion with whom to share my good fortune, and it did not take me long to come to a decision.

Prominent in my thoughts for some time had been a girl—you probably know her—Florrie Hamlett by name, daughter of Admiral Hamlett—her mother was a Wynge, rather a formidable old trout, but Florrie couldn't help that. She and I—and by she I mean Florrie, of course, not the old trout of a mother—had been seeing a good deal of each other lately, though not nearly so much as I could have wished. I confess that I found her society strangely congenial, and she didn't seem to object very strongly to mine. You see, we were particularly well suited to one another. I mean, she was different from ordinary girls—frightfully good-looking, with a lovely figure and very fair hair, and yet what you might call serious-minded, almost a highbrow in fact. That is to say she occasionally read books, and would go to plays that weren't musical comedies, and was quite keen about art and music. Naturally, therefore, she seemed a bit alarming to most of the young men she met, who were content to admire her from a safe distance and left the field pretty open to anyone of her own mental calibre. Not that she wasn't extremely popular; she was, especially with her girl friends. She had been a bridesmaid oftener than any of her contemporaries. She was so accustomed to standing over the hot-water pipes in the aisles of churches, grasping bouquets of heavily scented lilies; she was so used to posing for press photographers in

draughty porches, that she was practically immune from the effects of heat, cold, or nausea. She and I, as I said before, were the very best of friends, and I must admit that I was only awaiting a favourable opportunity to convert that friendship into something more durable and satisfactory.

When I got home that evening I rang Florrie up on the telephone and explained the whole business to her. She was fortunately free on Tuesday evening, and expressed herself as delighted with the idea of dining somewhere with me, and going on afterwards to the Heinzmacher concert.

I was very anxious that the party should prove a success, but felt a bit worried over the question of choosing a suitable restaurant. You see, if one is taking a girl to a musical comedy, the obvious place to dine at is the Savoy or the Berkeley or somewhere like that. But before a concert of serious music it seems more appropriate to choose less fashionable and conventional surroundings. I knew of a little restaurant at the back of Oxford Street where the atmosphere was more in keeping with the spirit in which one attends classical concerts, and Florrie promised to meet me there at seven o'clock.

I engaged a small table in the window, and, five minutes before the appointed hour, I might have been seen sitting there, impatiently studying the menu. At Bonavento's the food is very nearly as good as at the Carlton or the Savoy; it is possibly the very same food, only not quite so fresh, and certainly, by the time one has paid for the numerous extras, it seems almost equally as expensive. In some ways it is perhaps not quite so attractive as the less Bohemian restaurants, and I took the precaution of removing the vase containing three faded chrysanthemums, the saucer of damp olives, and the ash-tray advertising a well-known mineral water with which the table was decorated.

It was not until twenty minutes past seven that the swing-door opened and Florrie came into the room. I was alarmed to notice that she was not alone, but was accompanied by her mother, old Lady Hamlett, a lady for whom I had always entertained an active dislike. As a rule I am extremely fond of old ladies, as they are of me. It's a saying in our family that dogs, governesses, and elderly ladies all regard me with an instinctive affection which is flattering to my vanity, though at times somewhat embarrassing. Lady Hamlett was

the single exception to this rule. Our common fondness for Florrie caused us to regard one another with mutual suspicion, and we were never really happy together. I was therefore conscious of a feeling of intense disappointment which I fear I may have betrayed by my expression, for Florrie hurriedly began to make excuses for her mother's presence.

"I hope you don't mind," she said, "but poor Mother was all alone tonight and had nowhere to go."

I suppressed a strong inclination to suggest that Lady Hamlett might quite profitably have gone to bed.

"Delighted, I'm sure," I answered rather grimly, for I knew that, so far as I was concerned, the evening was ruined.

"Mother's so fond of music," Florrie continued. "She was wondering whether it would be possible to squeeze her in somewhere."

Anyone who had given a fleeting glance at Lady Hamlett's ample proportions would realize that not even with a giant shoe-horn could one possibly squeeze her into any space covered by less than three ordinary stalls.

"I do hope I'm not being a great bore," said Lady Hamlett.

"How can you think that?" I protested, though I could conceive of no reason for thinking otherwise.

Dinner proceeded gloomily enough. Florrie was unusually silent and, in spite of many efforts to behave decently, I could not help sulking, while Lady Hamlett's conversation added little to the gaiety of the meal.

"Dear Mr. Enderby," she said—my name does not happen to be Enderby, as you know, but she can never remember names—"Dear Mr. Enderby"—I might mention that Enderby is an admirer of Florrie's whom I particularly dislike—"I had no idea that you made any pretence even of being musical."

Somehow the word "pretence" roused all my worst passions.

"I expect I'm just as musical as most people who go to concerts," I said.

"Nonsense," said Florrie, coming to her mother's aid. "You know quite well you don't know anything at all about it."

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked indignantly.

"Well, you don't *play* anything—the piano, for instance——"

"The piano is not the only instrument in the world," I said rather coldly.

"Good gracious! Do you meant to say that you *do* play something?"

"Certainly I do."

"What *can* it be? Don't tell me that you've got a secret vice; that you play the trombone in your bedroom? I couldn't bear it!"

"You're being very funny, I'm sure," I said. "But I can't see anything peculiarly amusing about a trombone. In any case I do not happen to perform upon that particular instrument."

"Then what particular instrument do you happen to perform on?"

"If you want to know," I replied, "I happen to play the bassoon."

Florrie gave a shriek of girlish laughter. Her mother joined in with an irritating cackle that was particularly irritating.

"How too marvellous!" said Florrie.

"I really don't see anything to laugh at," I said. "You seem to have a very warped sense of humour."

"But it's wonderful," she insisted. "You must look too frightfully funny, you and your bassoon. I'd give worlds to see you. Won't you come to tea one night and play to me?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," I answered with growing annoyance.

"Not if I ask you to?"

"Not even if you went on your knees——"

"The chances of my ever assuming that attitude for such an absurd purpose are very remote!" Florrie, by this time, was herself becoming a trifle nettled.

"Then I think, as it's just after eight o'clock, we'd better go to our concert. Or rather," I added, "to *your* concert, for I doubt very much if I shall get in."

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Florrie unkindly. "You've only got to tell them that you play the bassoon!"

I turned a withering glance in her direction and rose from the table to show that the meal was at an end.

We drove in silence to the King's Hall, and I had barely paid the taxi when Lady Hamlett uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "What *do* you think I've done?"

There was no folly that I did not imagine her capable of committing, but I refrained from saying so.

"If I haven't left my little bag in the restaurant!" she went on. She turned to me. "I wonder if you'd be so very kind——"

"Oh, certainly!" I interrupted her bitterly. "I shall be delighted to go back and fetch it. Here are the tickets." I gave the envelope to Florrie. "Perhaps if you could ask for Mr. Basley—he's one of the orchestra—and leave my name at the door, he might be able to find a place for me."

I left my companions to find their own way to their seats, picked up another taxi, drove back to Bonavento's and there with some difficulty found and identified Lady Hamlett's bag. By the time I had returned to the King's Hall, the concert had begun and I found the doors of the auditorium mercilessly closed against me during the performance of the first item on the programme.

There was nothing to be done save to possess my soul in patience, but as soon as the doors were re-opened I hastily made my way to the passage at the back of the orchestra and hailed an attendant.

"I'm late," I explained. "But perhaps Mr. Basley left word——"

"Basley? Quite right," said the man. "We've been expecting you. You're only just in time. Come along."

I was immensely relieved to think that Florrie had somehow managed to get me a seat, and quickly followed the attendant as he threaded his way through the orchestra.

"Here you are," he said, pointing to an empty chair.

I sat down as quietly as possible, for I realized that the performance was about to be resumed, and my entrance seemed already to have caused a slight disturbance.

Once settled in my seat I had leisure to look round, and was astonished to find that I seemed to be sitting in the very centre of the orchestra itself. I realized that this was so when I noticed that on either side of me sat a man holding a bassoon in his hand.

The one on my right turned and whispered something in my ear.

"What do you say?" I inquired.

"Deputizing, eh?"

"I beg your pardon?"

He leant across to his fellow bassoon player.

"Old Basley's funk'd it after all," he said. "I thought he would."

"Yes," replied the other. "Jerry put the wind up him properly at rehearsal!" Then he turned to me. "You nearly missed the bus!" he said.

I confess that I found these cryptic remarks somewhat puzzling, and was about to ask for enlightenment when the conductor—no less a person than the great Herr Heinzmacher himself—tapped on his desk. A tense silence fell upon the house. A thrill of expectancy was in the air. I sat up and prepared to enjoy myself.

Suddenly the player on my right jogged my elbow.

"Where's your instrument?" he asked in an agonized whisper. "Here," he added, as I made no reply to this incomprehensible question, "for God's sake take mine!"

He pushed a bassoon into my hand, turned to his colleague and uttered one word: "Balmy!"

I looked up and noticed that Herr Heinzmacher was gazing at me with a very peculiar and embarrassing expression on his face—an expression in which ferocity and astonishment seemed to be fighting for supremacy. He tapped his desk again, raised his baton, pointed it directly at me and made two passes in the air. The silence seemed to have grown more profound than ever, and I became conscious that the eyes of every member of the orchestra were concentrated upon me. The player on my left gave my leg an agonizing pinch and pointed to the music on a stand in front of me.

"Your stunt," he whispered. "Go to it!"

With a sensation of inexpressible alarm, I observed the words "Solo Obbligato" written in red ink across the top of the manuscript. Suddenly, like a man waking from a dream, I appreciated the full horror of my position. I realized that I was assumed to be deputizing for the absent Basley, and that upon me devolved the duty of playing the opening bars of the famous "Die Schöpfung" symphony which was now to be given for the first time in England.

Herr Heinzmacher had grown pale, a look of intolerable anxiety was in his eye, while large beads of perspiration bespangled his brow. He tapped his desk again in a desperate fashion and once more began to wave his baton at me with a passionate gesture of entreaty, while a faint echo of the

word "Schweinhund!" floated from his desk in my direction.

To say that my heart stood still would be but a mild way of expressing my sensations. At that moment, as I believe happens in the case of drowning men, all my past life seemed to flash across my mind. I saw the world in a grain of sand and Eternity in an hour. And of the many incidents that I recalled in that brief instant of time one memory stood out with extraordinary prominence. I was back again in the old school drill-hall; in imagination I saw before me the tall figure of Dr. Rollo Posner conducting his notorious "Harvesting Time"; once more I heard myself playing the "cow" motif!

Half-consciously I clasped and raised the bassoon with fingers grown suddenly familiar, and, like a lover who has too long been parted from his mate, closed my lips in ecstasy upon the reed.

Just at that second I chanced somehow to catch sight of Florrie and her egregious mother, out of the corner of my eye, as they sat apparently spellbound behind the double basses. A wave of indignation swept over me. "I'll show them whether I can play!" I thought. "I'll teach them to laugh at my beloved bassoon!" And before the conductor's baton had reached its eighth beat I had come to a clear and rapid decision. I saw my duty plain before me, and in another moment I had taken a deep breath and with inflated cheeks was frenziedly playing as much as I could remember of the brief obbligato that twenty years ago had excited so much comment from the parents of my little play-fellows at the school concert.

It is no exaggeration to say that on this occasion I played as I had never played before—indeed, as one inspired. Herr Heinzmacher's expression of rage gave place to a look of fascinated perplexity. The veins on his neck stood out so prominently that at any moment he seemed to be in danger of exploding. He could still be heard muttering the strangest Teutonic oaths under his breath but he did not completely lose his self-control, and mechanically kept on beating time with a trembling baton.

At the back of the orchestra the worthy tympani-players had been laboriously counting the beats, awaiting their cue, and at the end of their sixteen bars' rest they came in with a loud roll on the kettle-drums. In another moment the whole

band of musicians had taken up the tale, and the great "Die Schöpfung" symphony was safely launched upon its way.

The unaccustomed strain had proved almost too much for me. Shattered and exhausted I sank into my chair, buried my head in my hands, and allowed my neighbour to relieve me of his bassoon. Of the result of my efforts I was barely conscious, and yet a feeling of intense exhilaration upheld me, and I could see by the envious glances of my neighbours that mine had been no ordinary triumph.

Of the subsequent events of that evening I remember little. I recall vaguely that at the close of the symphony the ovation given to the composer was unique in its enthusiasm. Herr Heinzmacher was forced to take seven calls; the orchestra stood up no less than three times to acknowledge the applause, and on the last occasion the conductor stepped forward and shook me warmly by the hand. In the subsequent confusion I managed to creep away and escape from the building, and was soon back at home.

That night I slept like a tired child, woke late next morning, and, after a hearty breakfast, turned with interest to my daily paper to read the musical critic's notice of the performance. It read as follows :

The principal feature of last night's Philmelodic Concert at the King's Hall was the performance of Herr Heinzmacher's "Die Schöpfung"—familiarily known in Dresden as the Sauerkraut Symphony—conducted by the composer in person. Of the merits of Herr Heinzmacher as a conductor it is difficult to speak. His mannerisms are peculiar and his methods eccentric. The passionate intensity, the dramatic exuberance, with which he conducted the delicate opening phrases of his work, seemed out of all proportion to their content, and adversely affected the balance of an orchestra accustomed to the less ferocious methods of our native conductors. Later on, however, Herr Heinzmacher succeeded in demonstrating his complete control over a band of instrumentalists whom we may well regard as artistically and technically superior to any foreign orchestra. The woodwind was especially true and accurate in attack—the humorous bassoon obbligato, suggestive (as we read in the Synopsis) of the first appearance on earth of animal life in the shape of cattle, was handled with especial virtuosity by a player whose name was not given on our programme. . . .

I sent out for an early edition of the *Evening Post*, and read a similarly laudatory criticism :

. . . It is only fair to say that if "Die Schöpfung" is typical of Herr Heinzmacher's work, our English composers must look to their laurels. The Symphony, as its name implies, is founded upon that most sublime of themes, the Creation of the World, and is suitably divided into six movements, each representing a day of the Creator's busiest week. The first (Andante) movement opens most originally with four completely silent bars during which nothing is heard but the faint fluttering of the conductor's baton, doubtless symbolical of the beating wings of that Angel of Peace which hovered over the deep, ere Time was and Life began. Gradually through the stillness one hears (from a single bassoon, admirably played by Mr. Josiah Basley) the faint indeterminate bleatings of some antediluvian monster rising from its primordial ooze, and typifying Matter's first vain attempt at self-creation. After a marvellously manipulated cadenza comes a sudden roll on the kettle-drums—handled with his usual verve by Mr. Blodge, the doyen of tympanists, whom we are glad to see back after his recent bereavement. This is followed by a deafening crash from the cymbals, frightening the reign of Chaos and old Night, and signifying the thunderous anger of a jealous Providence. And presently the strings, woodwind, and brass join in, and the movement is carried to a stately conclusion when the evening and the morning are the first day, and it is all very good.

It must be admitted that the critics were not all as enthusiastic as this writer. Indeed, Sir Rollo Posner wrote indignantly to *The Musical Times* to say that "Die Schöpfung" was obviously the work of a charlatan who was not above deliberately stealing his motifs from earlier English composers. *The Evening Mail*, too, likened the bassoon solo to the squeakings of an embittered albatross, but I paid no attention to this piece of impertinence.

At about eleven o'clock my telephone-bell rang. I took off the receiver and heard a well-known and once-loved voice.

"Hullo!" it said. "Is that you?"

"Yes," I answered, trying to appear cold and distant. "It's me."

"I felt I just *must* ring you up," said Florrie.

"Really?"

"I had no idea! It was too wonderful!"

"What was?"

"Your playing, of course."

"Oh, that," I answered nonchalantly. "Yes, I remember you said it would be—wonderfully funny!"

"Darling, I'm sorry I was such a beast. Won't you forgive me?"

"Oh, well . . ." I began, for my feelings were still a little sore.

"I'm not actually on my knees," she went on, "because the telephone's too high up to reach like that, but I do want to ask you a favour."

"Go ahead," I said, slightly mollified by the tenderness of her tone.

"Will you come round to tea today?" she asked.

"If you really want me to."

"There's nothing I want more. Nothing!"

"Florrie!"

"And you'll bring your bassoon and play it to me, won't you?"

"Darling!"

"At four o'clock, then! Good-bye!"

My cup of happiness was full. I hung up the receiver with a sigh of content, and went off to the boxroom to look for my bassoon.

"That," said Reginald, as he gulped down a glass of old brandy, "is the end of my remarkable story."

"I congratulate you," I said.

"What on?"

"Aren't you going to marry the girl?" I asked.

"Marry her? Me? Oh no!"

"Doesn't she——?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Why not?" I said. "Didn't you go to tea?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I took my bassoon."

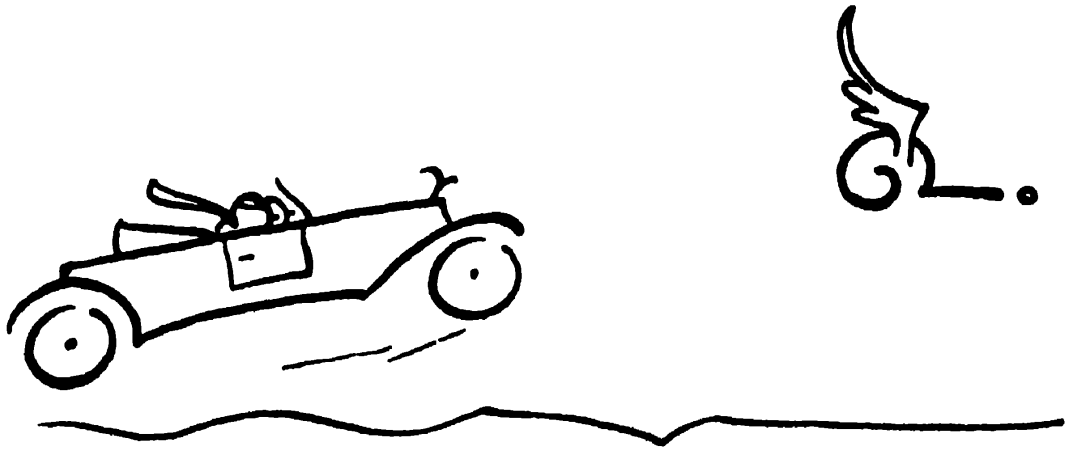
"Yes?"

"And I played it to her," he explained.

"Oh, I see!"

"Charles," Biffin called to the waiter, "bring two more large double brandies, and go on bringing them till I tell you to stop!"

THE TREASURE HUNT



MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART was born at Pittsburg, Pa. She trained to become a nurse and her experience in this field served as a background for several of her detective stories. She is very well known in America as a humorous writer and as a playwright, and the following story will show how well she combines her detection and her humour.

THE TREASURE HUNT

I

HAD we not been so anxious about our dear Tish last summer, I dare say it would never have happened. But even Charlie Sands noticed when he came to our cottage at Lake Penzance for the week-end that she was distinctly not her old self.

"I don't like it," he said. "She's lost her pep, or something. I've been here two days and she hasn't even had a row with Hannah, and I must say that fuss with old Carpenter yesterday really wasn't up to her standard at all."

Old Carpenter is a fisherman, and Tish having discovered that our motor-boat went better in reverse than forward, he had miscalculated our direction and we had upset him.

As it happened, that very evening Tish herself confirmed Charlie's fears by asking about Aggie's Cousin Sarah Brown's Chelsea teapot.

"I think," she said, "that a woman of my age should have a hobby—one that will arouse interest at the minimum of physical exertion. And the collection of old china——"

"Oh, Tish!" Aggie wailed, and burst into tears.

"I mean it," said Tish. "I have reached that period of my life which comes to every woman, when adventure no longer lurks around the next corner. By this I do not refer necessarily to amorous affairs, but to dramatic incidents. I think more than I did of what I eat. I take a nap every day. I am getting old."

"Never!" said Aggie valiantly.

"No? When I need my glasses nowadays to see the telephone directory!"

"But they're printing the names smaller, Tish."

"Yes, and I dare say my arm is getting shorter also," she returned with a sad smile. She pursued the subject no further,

however, but went on knitting the bedroom slippers which are her yearly contribution to the Old Ladies' Home, leaving Charlie Sands to gaze at her thoughtfully as he sipped his blackberry cordial.

But the fact is that Tish had outgrown the cottage life at Penzance, and we all knew it. Save for an occasional golf-ball from the links breaking a window now and then, and the golfers themselves who brought extra shoes done up in paper for us to keep for them, paying Hannah something to put them on the ice, there was nothing to rouse or interest her.

Her mind was as active as ever; it was her suggestion that a clothes-pin on Aggie's nose might relieve the paroxysms of her hay fever, and she was still filled with sentiment. It was her own idea on the anniversary of Mr. Wiggins' demise to paint the cottage roof a fresh and verdant green as a memorial to him, since he had been a master roofer by profession.

But these had been the small and simple annals of her days. To all outward seeming, until the night of the treasure hunt, our Tish was no longer the Tish who with our feeble assistance had captured the enemy town of X—— during the war, or held up the band of cut-throats on Thundercloud, or led us through the wilderness of the Far West. An aeroplane in the sky or the sound of the Smith boys racing along in their stripped flivver may have reminded her of brighter days, but she said nothing.

Once, indeed, she had hired a horse from the local livery stable and taken a brief ride, but while making a short cut across the Cummings estate the animal overturned a beehive. Although Tish, with her customary presence of mind, at once headed the terrified creature for the swimming-pool, where a number of persons were bathing and sunning themselves in scanty apparel about the edge, the insects forsook the beast the moment horse and rider plunged beneath the surface, and a great many people were severely stung. Indeed, the consequences threatened to be serious, for Tish was unable to get the horse out again and it was later necessary to bring a derrick from Penzance to rescue him. But her protests over the enormous bills rendered by the livery man were feeble, indeed, compared to the old days.

"Twenty dollars!" she said. "Are you claiming that

that animal, which should have been able to jump over a beehive without upsetting it, was out ten hours?"

"That's my charge," he said. "Walk, trot, and canter is regular rates, but swimming is double, and cheap at that. The next time you want to go out riding, go to the fish pier and I reckon they'll oblige you. You don't need a horse, lady. What you want is a blooming porpoise."

Which, of course, is preposterous. There are no porpoises in Lake Penzance.

She even made the blackberry cordial that year, a domestic task usually left to Aggie and myself, but I will say with excellent results. For just as it was ready for that slight fermentation which gives it its medicinal quality, a very pleasant young man came to see us, having for sale a fluid to be added to home-made cordials and so on which greatly increased their bulk without weakening them.

"But how can one dilute without weakening?" Tish demanded suspiciously.

"I would not call it dilution, madam. It is really expansion."

It was a clear, colourless liquid with a faintly aromatic odour, which he said was due to juniper in it, and he left us a small bottle for experimental purposes.

With her customary caution, our dear Tish would not allow us to try it until it had been proved, and some days later, Hannah reporting a tramp at the back door, she diluted—or rather expanded—a half-glass of cordial, gave him some cookies with it, and we all waited breathlessly.

It had no ill effect, however. The last we saw of the person he was quite cheery; and, indeed, we heard later that he went into Penzance, and, getting one of the town policemen into an alley, forced him to change trousers with him. As a matter of record, whether it was Tish's efforts with the cordial itself, or the addition of the expansion matter which we later purchased in bulk and added, I cannot say. But I do know that on one occasion, having run out of petrol, we poured a bottle of our blackberry cordial into the tank of the motor-boat and got home very nicely indeed. I believe that this use of fruit juices has not heretofore been generally known.

Tish, I know, told it to Mr. Stubbs, the farmer who brought us our poultry, advising him to try cider in his car

instead of feeding his apples to his hogs. But he only stared at her.

"Feed apples to hogs these days!" he said. "Why, lady, my hogs ain't seen an apple for four years! They don't know there is such a thing."

Occupied with these small and homely duties, then, we went on along the even tenor of our way through July and August, and even into September. In August, Charlie Sands sent us a radio, and thereafter it was our custom at 7.20 a.m. to carry our comforters into Tish's bedroom and do divers exercises in loose undergarments.

It is to this training that I lay Tish's ability to go through the terrible evening which followed with nothing more serious than a crack in a floating rib.

And in September, Charlie Sands himself week-ended with us, as I have said; with the result of a definite break in our monotony and a revival of Tish's interest in life, which has not yet begun to fade.

Yet his visit itself was uneventful enough. It was not until Mrs. Ostermaier's call on Saturday evening that anything began to develop. I remember the evening most distinctly. Our dear Tish was still in her dressing-gown, after a very unpleasant incident of the morning, when she had inflated a pair of water-wings and gone swimming. Unluckily, when some distance out she had endeavoured to fasten the water-wings with a safety-pin to her bathing-garments and the air at once began to escape. When Charlie Sands reached the spot only a few bubbles showed where our unfortunate Tish had been engulfed. She had swallowed a great deal of water, and he at once suggested bailing her out.

"By and large," he said, "I've been bailing you out for the last ten years. Why not now?"

But she made no response save to say that she had swallowed a fish. "Get me a doctor," she said thickly. "I can feel the thing wriggling."

"Doctor nothing!" he told her. "What you need is a fisherman, if that's the case."

But she refused to listen to him, saying that if she was meant to be an aquarium she would be one; and seeing she was firm, he agreed.

"Very well," he said cheerfully. "But why not do the

thing right while you're about it? How about some pebbles and a tadpole or two?"

The result of all this was that Tish, although later convinced there was no fish, was in an uncertain mood that evening as we sat about the radio. She had, I remember, got Chicago, where a lady at some hotel was singing "By the Waters of Minnetonka". Turning away from Chicago, she then got Detroit, Michigan, and a woman there was singing the same thing.

Somewhat impatiently, she next picked up Atlanta, Georgia, where a soprano was also singing it, and the same thing happened with Montreal, Canada. With a strained look, our dear Tish then turned to the national capital, and I shall never forget her expression when once more the strains of "Minnetonka" rang out on the evening air.

With an impatient gesture she shoved the box away from her, and the various batteries and so on fell to the floor. And at that moment Mrs. Ostermaier came in breathless, and said that she and Mr. Ostermaier had just got Denver, and heard it quite distinctly.

"A woman was singing," she said. "Really, Miss Carberry, we could hear every word! She was singing——"

"'The Waters of Minnetonka'?" asked Tish.

"Why, however did you guess it?"

It was probably an accident, but as Tish got up suddenly, her elbow struck the box itself, and the box fell with a horrible crash. Tish never even looked at it, but picked up her knitting and fell to work on a bedroom slipper, leaving Mrs. Ostermaier free to broach her plan.

For, as it turned out, she had come on an errand. She and Mr. Ostermaier wished to know if we could think of any way to raise money and put a radio in the State penitentiary, which was some miles away along the lake front.

"Think," she said, "of the terrible monotony of their lives there! Think of the effect of the sweetness disseminated by 'Silver Threads Among the Gold' or 'By the Waters of——' "

"Mr. Wiggins always said that music had power to soothe the savage breast," Aggie put in hastily. "Have you thought of any plan?"

"Mr. Ostermaier suggested that Miss Tish might think of something. She is so fertile."

But Tish's reaction at first was unfavourable.

"Why?" she said. "We've made our gaols so pleasant now that there's a crime wave so people can get into them." But she added: "I'm in favour of putting one in every prison if they'd hire a woman to sing 'The Waters of Minnetonka' all day and all night. If that wouldn't stop this rush to the penitentiaries, nothing will."

On the other hand, Charlie Sands regarded the idea favourably. He sat sipping a glass of cordial and thinking, and at last said:

"Why not? Think of an entire penitentiary doing the morning daily dozen! Or laying out bridge hands according to radio instructions! Broaden 'em. Make 'em better citizens. Send 'em out fit to meet the world again. Darned good idea—'Silver Threads Among the Gold' for the burglars and 'Little Brown Jug' for the bootleggers. Think of 'Still as the Night' for the moonshiners, too, and the bedtime stories for the cradle-snatchers. Why, it's got all sorts of possibilities!"

He then said to leave it to him and he would think up something, and, falling to work on the radio, soon had it in operation again. His speech had evidently had a quieting effect on Tish, and when the beautiful strains of "The Waters of Minnetonka" rang out once more she merely placed her hands over her ears and said nothing.

It was after his departure on Monday that he wrote us the following note, and succeeded in rousing our dear Tish:

Beloved Maiden Ladies,

I have been considering the problem of the radio for our unfortunate convicts. How about a treasure hunt—à la Prince of Wales—to raise the necessary lucre? I'll write the clues and bury a bag of pennies—each entrant to pay five dollars, and the profits to go to the cause.

Oil up the old car and get out the knickerbockers, for it's going to be a tough job. And don't forget, I'm betting on you. Read the "Murders in the rue Morgue" for clues and deductive reasoning. And pass me the word when you're ready.

Devotedly,

C.S.

P.S. My usual terms are twenty per cent, but will take two bottles of cordial instead. Please mark "Preserves" on box. C.

II

We saw an immediate change in Tish from that moment. The very next morning we put on our bathing-suits and, armed with soap and sponges, drove the car into the lake for a washing. Unluckily a wasp stung Tish on the bare knee as we advanced and she stepped on the gas with great violence, sending us out a considerable distance, and, indeed, rendering it necessary to crawl out and hold to the top to avoid drowning.

Here we were marooned for some time, until Hannah spied us and rowed out to us. It was finally necessary to secure three horses and a long rope to retrieve the car, and it was some days in drying out.

But aside from these minor matters, things went very well. Mr. Ostermaier, who was not to search, took charge of the hunt from our end and reported numerous entrants from among the summer colony, and to each entrant the following was issued :

1. The cars of the treasure hunters will meet at the Rectory on Saturday evening at eight o'clock.
2. Each hunter will receive a password or sentence and a sealed envelope containing the first clue.
3. This clue found, another password and fresh sealed envelope will be discovered. And so on.
4. There are six clues.
5. Participants are requested to use care in driving about the country, as the local police force has given notice that it will be stationed at various points to prevent reckless driving.
6. After the treasure is discovered, the hunt will please meet at the Rectory, where light refreshments will be served. It is requested that if possible the search be over before midnight in order not to infringe on the Sabbath day.

In view of the fact that certain persons, especially Mrs. Cummings—who should be the last to complain—have accused Tish of certain unethical acts during that terrible night, I wish to call attention to certain facts :

(a) We obeyed the above rules to the letter, save possibly number five.

- (b) There was no actual identification of the scissors.
- (c) If there was a box of carpet-tacks in our car, neither Aggie nor I saw them.
- (d) The fish pier had been notoriously rotten for years.
- (e) We have paid for the repairs to the motor-cycle, and so on.
- (f) Dr. Parkinson is not permanently lamed, and we have replaced his lamps.
- (g) Personally, knowing Tish's detestation of crossword puzzles, I believe the false clues were a joke on the part of others concerned.
- (h) We did that night what the local police and the sheriff from Edgewater had entirely failed to do, and risked our lives in so doing. Most of the attack is purely jealousy of Letitia Carberry's astute brain and dauntless physical courage.

I need say no more. As Tish observed to Charlie Sands the next day, when he came to see her, lifting herself painfully in her bed :

"I take no credit for following the clues ; they were simplicity itself. And I shall pay all damages incurred. But who is to pay for this cracked rib and divers minor injuries, or replace poor Aggie's teeth ? Tell me that, and then get out and let me sleep. I'm an old woman."

"Old !" said Charlie Sands. "Old ! If you want to see an aged and a broken man, look at me ! I shall have to put on a false moustache to get out of town."

But to return to the treasure-hunt.

On the eventful day we worked hard. By arrangement with Mr. Stubbs, our poultry-man, he exchanged the licence plates from his lorry for ours in the morning, and these we put on, it being Tish's idea that in case our number was taken by the local motor policeman, Mr. Stubbs could prove that he was in bed and asleep at the time. We also took out our tail-light, as Tish said that very probably the people who could not unravel their clues would follow us if possible, and late in the afternoon, our arrangements being completed, Tish herself retired to her chamber with a number of envelopes in her hand.

Lest it be construed that she then arranged the crossword puzzles which were later substituted for the real clues, I hasten to add that I believe, if I do not actually know, that

she wrote letters concerning the missionary society at that time. She is an active member.

At 5.30 we had an early supper and one glass of cordial each.

"I think better on an empty stomach," Tish said. "And I shall need my brains tonight."

"If that's what you think of Aggie and myself, we'd better stay at home," I said sharply.

"I have not stated what I think of your brain, Lizzie, nor of Aggie's either. Until I do, you have no reason for resentment."

Peace thus restored, we ate lightly of tea, toast, and lettuce sandwiches; and, having donned our knickerbockers and soft hats, were ready for the fray. Aggie carrying a small flask of cordial for emergencies and I a flashlight and an angel-food cake to be left at the Rectory, we started out on what was to prove one of the most eventful evenings in our experience.

Tish was thoughtful on the way over, speaking occasionally of Poe and his system of deductive reasoning in solving clues, and also of Conan Doyle, but mostly remaining silent.

Aggie, however, was sneezing badly, due to the dust, and this annoying Tish, she stopped where some washing was hanging out and sent her in for a clothes-pin. She procured the pin, but was discovered and chased, and undoubtedly this is what led later to the story that the bandits—of whom more later—had, before proceeding to the real business of the night, attempted to steal the Whitings' washing.

But the incident had made Aggie very nervous and she took a second small dose of the cordial. Of this also more later on.

There was a large group of cars in front of the Rectory. The Smith boys had brought their flivver, stripped of everything but the engine and one seat for lightness, and the Cummingses, who are very wealthy, had brought their racer. Tish eyed them both with a certain grimness.

"Not speed, but brains will count, Lizzie," she said to me. "What does it matter how fast they can go if they don't know where they're going?"

After some thought, however, she took off the engine-hood and the spare tyre and laid them aside, and stood gazing at Aggie, now fast asleep in the rear seat.

"I could leave her too," she said. "She will be of no help whatever. But, on the other hand, she helps to hold the rear springs down when passing over bumps."

Mrs. Ostermaier then passed around glasses of lemonade, saying that every hunt drank a stirrup-cup before it started, and Mr. Ostermaier gave us our envelopes and the first password, which was "Ichthyosaurus".

It was some time before everyone had memorized it, and Tish utilized the moments to open her envelope and study the clue. The password, as she said, was easy; merely a prehistoric animal. The clue was longer:

Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.
Two twos are four, though some say more, and i-n-k spells ink.

"Water?" I said. "That must be somewhere by the lake, Tish."

"Nonsense! What's to prevent your drinking the lake dry if you want to? I-n-k! It may be the stationer's shop; but if it ever saw water, I don't believe it. 'Two twos are four, though some say more!' Well, if they do, they're fools, and so is Charlie Sands for writing such gibberish."

What made matters worse was that the Smith boys were already starting off laughing, and two or three other people were getting ready to move. Suddenly Tish set her mouth and got into the car, and it was as much as I could do to crawl in before she had cut straight through the canna bed and out on to the road.

The Smith boys were well ahead, but we could still see their tail-light, and we turned after them. Tish held the wheel tightly, and as we flew along she repeated the clue, which with her wonderful memory she had already learned by heart. But no light came to either of us, and at the cross-roads we lost the Smith boys and were obliged to come to a stop. This we did rather suddenly, and Mr. Gilbert, who is a vestryman in our church, bumped into us and swore in a most unbecoming manner.

"Where the hell is your tail-light?" he called furiously.

"You ought to know," said Tish calmly. "Somewhere in your engine, I imagine."

Well, it seemed that everyone had been following us, and no one except the Smith boys apparently knew where to go from there. And just then a policeman came out of the bushes and asked what the trouble was.

"Ichthyosaurus," said Tish absently. "'Water, water

everywhere, nor any drop to drink. Two twos are four, though some say more, and——’ ”

“Don’t try to be funny with me,” he said. “For a cent I’d take the whole lot of you into town for obstructing traffic. You’ve been drinking, that’s what !”

And just then Aggie sat up in the back seat and said : “Drinking yourself ! Go on, Tish, and run over him. He’sh a nuisance.”

Well, I will say her voice was somewhat thick, and the constable got on the running-board and struck a match. But Tish was in her seat by that time, and she started the car so suddenly that he fell off into the road. As the other cars had to drive round him, this gave us a certain advantage ; and we had soon left them behind us, but we still had no idea where to go. Matters were complicated also by the fact that Tish had now extinguished our headlights for fear of again being molested, and we were as often off the road as on it.

Indeed, once we brought up inside a barn and were only saved from going entirely through it by our dear Tish’s quick work with the brakes ; and we then had the agony of hearing the other cars pass by on the main road while we were backing away from the ruins of a feed-cutter we had smashed.

We had also aroused a number of chickens, and as we could hear the farmer running out and yelling, there was nothing to do but to back out again. Just as we reached the main road a load of buckshot tore through the top of the car, but injured nobody.

“Luckily he was shooting high,” said Tish as we drove on. “Lower, and he might have cut our tyres.”

“Luckily !” said Aggie, from the rear seat. “He’sh taken the crown out of my hat, Tish Carberry ! It was nish hat too. I loved my little hat. I——”

“Oh, keep still and go to sleep again,” said Tish. “‘Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink. Two twos are four, though some say more, and i-n-k spells ink.’ ”

“So it did when I went to school,” said Aggie, still drowsily. “I-n-k, ink ; p-i-n-k, pink ; s——”

Suddenly Tish put her foot on the gas and we shot ahead once more.

“School-house of course,” she said. “The school-house by the water-tower. I knew my sub-conscious mind would work it out eventually.”

III

Unfortunately, we were the last to get to the school-house, and we had to witness the other cars streaming triumphantly down the road as we went up, shouting and blowing their horns. All but the Simmonses' sedan, which had turned over in a ditch and which we passed hastily, having no time to render assistance.

Miss Watkins, the school-teacher, was on the porch, and as we drew up Tish leaped out.

"Pterodactyl!" she said.

"Warm, but not hot," said Miss Watkins.

"Plesiosaurus!"

"The end's all right."

"Ichthyosaurus!" said Tish triumphantly, and received the envelope. Aggie, however, who had not heard the password given at the Ostermaiers', had listened to this strange conversation dazedly and now burst into tears.

"There'sh something wrong with me, Lizzie!" she wailed. "I've felt queer ever since we started, and now they are talking and it doesn't sound like sensh to me."

It was some time before I was able to quiet her, but Tish had already received the second password, or sentence, which was "Prevention is better than cure, ting-a-ling", and was poring over the next clue.

Always first in danger, always last to go,
Look inside the fire-box and then you'll know.

I still think that had she taken sufficient time she could have located this second clue easily and without the trouble that ensued. But finding herself last when she is so generally first had irritated her, and she was also annoyed at Miss Watkins, it having been arranged that the last car was to take her back into town.

"Mr. Ostermaier said the clue's in town anyhow. And he didn't think the last car would have much chance, either," she said.

"Who laughs last laughs best," said Tish grimly, and started off at a frightful speed. Miss Watkins lost her hat within the first mile or two, but we could not pause, as a

motor-cycle policeman was now following close behind us. Owing to Tish's strategy, however, for when he attempted to come up on the right of us she swerved in that direction and vice versa, we finally escaped him, an unusually sharp swerve of hers having caught him off guard, so to speak, and upset him.

Just when or where we lost Miss Watkins I have no idea. Aggie had again dozed off, and when we reached the town and slowed up, Miss Watkins was gone. She herself does not know, as she seems to have wandered for some time in a dazed condition before reaching home.

But to the hunt.

I still think our mistake was a natural one. One would think that the pass sentence, "Prevention is better than cure, ting-a-ling", certainly indicated either a pharmacy or a medical man and a door-bell, and as Tish said, a fire-box was most likely a wood-box. There being only two doctors in the town, we went first to Dr. Burt's; but he had already retired, and spoke to us from an upper window.

"We want to examine your wood-box," Tish called.

"Wood-box?" he said, in a stupefied voice. "What do you want wood for? A splint?"

"We're hunting treasure," said Tish sharply. "'Prevention is better than cure, ting-a-ling.'"

The doctor closed the window violently; and although we rang for some time, he did not appear again.

At Dr. Parkinson's, however, we had better luck, discovering the side entrance to the house open and finding our way inside with the aid of the flashlight. There was only one wood-box on the lower floor, and this we proceeded to search, laying the wood out carefully on to a newspaper. But we found no envelopes, and in the midst of our discouragement came a really dreadful episode.

Dr. Parkinson himself appeared at the door in his night-clothes, and, not recognizing us because of our attire and goggles, pointed a revolver at us.

"Hands up!" he cried in a furious tone. "Hands up, you dirty devils! And be quick about it!"

"'Prevention is better than cure, ting-a-ling'," said Tish.

"Ting-a-ling your own self! Of all the shameless proceedings I've ever——"

"Shame on you!" Tish reproved him. "If ting-a-ling means nothing to you, we will leave you."

"Oh no, you don't!" he said most unpleasantly. "Put up your hands as I tell you or——"

I do not now and I never did believe the story he has since told over the town—that Tish threw the fire-log she was holding at his legs. I prefer to credit her own version—that as she was trying to raise her hands the wood fell, with most unfortunate results. As a matter of fact, the real risk was run by myself, for when on the impact he dropped the revolver, it exploded and took off the heel of my right shoe.

Nor is it true, as he claims, that having been forced out of his house, we attempted to get back in and attack him again. This error is due to the fact that, once outside, Tish remembered the revolver on the floor, and, thinking it might be useful later, went back to get it. But the door was locked.

However, all is well that ends well. We had but driven a block or two when we perceived a number of the cars down the street at the engine-house, and proceeded to find our next clue in the box of the local fire-engine.

The password this time was "Prohibition", and the clue ran :

Just two blocks from paradise and only one from hell,
Stranger things than truth are found in the bottom of a well.

The Smith boys had already gone on, but we were now at last on equal terms with the others, and as the sleep and the cold night air had by now fully restored Aggie, Tish called a consultation.

"So far," she said, "the Smiths have had the advantage of superior speed. But it is my opinion that this advantage is an unfair one, and that I have a right to nullify it if opportunity arises."

"We'll have to catch them first," I observed.

"We shall catch them," she said firmly, and once more studied the clue.

"Paradise," she said, "should be the Eden Inn. To save time we will circumnavigate it at a distance of two blocks."

This we did, learning later that Hell's Kitchen was the name locally given to the negro quarter, and once more Tish's masterly deciphering of the clue served us well. Before the other cars had much more than started, we espied the Smiths' stripped flivver outside the Gilbert place, and to lose no time

drove through the hedge and on to the lawn. Here, as is well known, the Gilberts have an old well, long disused, or so supposed. And here we found the Gilberts' gardener standing and the Smith boys drawing up the well bucket.

"Give the word and get the envelope," Tish whispered to me, and disappeared into the darkness.

I admit this. I admit, too, that, as I have said before, I know nothing of her actions for the next few moments. Personally, I believe that she went to the house, as she has stated, to get the Gilbert cook's recipe for jelly roll; and, as anyone knows, considerable damage may be done to an uncovered engine by flying stones. To say that she cut certain wires while absent is to make a claim not borne out by the evidence.

But I will also say that the Smith boys up to that moment had had an unfair advantage, and that the inducing of a brief delay on their part was not forbidden by the rules, which are on my desk as I write. However . . .

As Mr. Gilbert is not only prominent in the church but is also the local prohibition officer, judge of our surprise when, on the well bucket emerging, we found in it not only the clues but some bottles of beer which had apparently been put there to cool. And Mr. Gilbert, on arriving with the others, seemed greatly upset.

"Hawkins," he said to the gardener, "what do you mean by hiding six bottles of beer in my well?"

"Me?" said Hawkins angrily. "If I had six bottles of beer, they'd be in no well! And there aren't six; there's only four."

"Four!" said Mr. Gilbert in a furious voice. "Four! Then who the dev——" Here, however, he checked himself; and as Tish had now returned we took our clues and departed. Hawkins had given us the next password, which was "Good evening, dearie," and the clue, which read:

Down along the lake front, in a pleasant place,
Is a splendid building, full of air and space.
Glance within a closet, where, neatly looped and tagged,
Are the sturdy symbols of the game they've bagged.

Everybody seemed to think it meant the Duck Club, and in a few moments we were all off once more except the Smith

boys, who were talking loudly and examining their engine. But Tish was not quite certain.

"These clues are tricky," she said. "They are not obvious, but subtle. It sounds too much like the Duck Club to be the Duck Club. Besides, what symbols of dead ducks would they keep? I've never seen anything left over but the bones."

"The feathers?" Aggie suggested.

"They wouldn't keep feathers in a closet. And besides, there's nothing sturdy about a feather. What other large building is on the lake front?"

"The fish-cannery," I said.

"True. And they might keep boards in a closet with the outlines of very large fish on them. But the less said about the air there the better. However, we might try it."

Having made this decision, as soon as we were outside of Penzance we began once more to travel with extreme rapidity, retracing for some distance the road we had come in on, and thus it happened that we again saw the motor-cycle policeman with his side-car. He was repairing something and shouted angrily at us as we passed, but we did not even hesitate, and soon we arrived at the fish-cannery.

None of the others had apparently thought of this possibility, and when we reached it there was no one in sight but a bearded watchman with a lantern, sitting on a barrel outside. Tish hopefully leaped from the car and gave him the password at once.

"'Good evening, dearie.'"

But the wretch only took his pipe out of his mouth and, after expectorating into the lake, replied:

"Hello, sweetheart. And what can I do for you?"

"Don't be impertinent," said Tish tartly. "I said 'Good evening, dearie,' as a signal."

"And a darned fine signal I call it," he said, rising. "Let's have a look at you before the old lady comes along with my supper."

"I have given you the signal. If you haven't anything for me, say so."

"Well, what is it you want?" he inquired, grinning at us in a horrible manner. "A kiss?"

As he immediately began to advance towards Tish, to this action on his part may be laid the misfortune which almost at once beset us. For there is no question that had it not discom-

posed her she would never have attempted to turn by backing on to the fish pier, which has been rotten for years. But in her indignation she did so, and to our horror we felt the thing giving way beneath us. There was one loud sharp crack followed by the slow splintering of wood, and the next moment we were resting gently on some piles above the water, with the shattered framework of the pier overhead and the watchman yelling that the company would sue us for damages.

"Damages!" said Tish, still holding to the steering-wheel, while Aggie wailed in the rear. "You talk of damages to me! I'll put you and your company in the penitentiary if I have to——"

Here she suddenly checked herself and turned to me.

"The penitentiary, of course!" she said. "How stupid of us! And I dare say they keep the ropes they hang people with in a closet. They have to keep them somewhere. Speaking of ropes," she went on, raising her voice, "if that old fool up there will get a rope, I dare say we can scramble out."

"Old fool yourself!" cried the watchman, dancing about. "Coming here and making love to me, and then destroying my pier! You can sit there till those piles rot, far's I'm concerned. There's something queer about this business anyhow; how do I know you ain't escaped from the pen?"

"My dear man," said Tish quietly, "the one thing we want is to get to the penitentiary, and that as soon as possible."

"Well, you won't have any trouble getting there," he retorted. "I'll see to that. Far's you're concerned, you're on your way."

He then disappeared, and one of the piles yielding somewhat, the car fell a foot or two more, while Aggie wailed and sneezed alternately. But Tish remained composed. She struck a match, and leaning over the side inspected the water and so on below us.

"There's a boat down there, Lizzie," she said. "Get the towrope from under Aggie and fasten it to something. If we can get down, we'll be all right. The penitentiary isn't more than a half-mile from here."

"I slide down no rope into no boat, Tish Carberry," I said firmly.

But at that moment we heard the engine of a motor-cycle coming along the road and realized that our enemy the policeman had followed us. And as at that same instant the car

again slipped with a sickening jar, we were compelled to this heroic attempt after all.

However, it was managed without untoward incident, Aggie even salvaging the flask of blackberry cordial. But the boat was almost filled with water, and thus required frantic bailing with our hats, a matter only just accomplished when the motor-cycle policeman came running on to the pier.

Whether the watchman had failed to tell him of the break or not, I cannot say, but we were no more than under way when we heard a splash followed by strangled oaths, and realized that for a time at least we were safe from pursuit.

Wet as we now were, we each took a small dose of the cordial and then fell to rowing. Tish's watch showed only ten o'clock, and we felt greatly cheered and heartened. Also, as Tish said by way of comforting Aggie, the licence plates on the car belonging to Mr. Stubbs, it was unlikely that we would be further involved for the present at least.

IV

Owing to the fact that the cars still in the hunt had all gone to the Duck Club, the brief delay had not lost us our lead, and we proceeded at once, after landing near the penitentiary, to the gate. Our halt there was brief. Tish merely said to the sentry at the entrance, " 'Good evening, dearie.' "

"The same to you and many of them," he replied cheerfully, and unlocked the gate. We then found ourselves in a large courtyard, with the looming walls of the building before us, and on ringing the bell and repeating the phrase were at once admitted.

There were a number of men in uniform, who locked the grating behind us and showed us into an office where a young man was sitting at a desk.

I had an uneasy feeling the moment I saw him, and Aggie has since acknowledged the same thing. Instead of smiling as had the others, he simply pushed a large book towards us and asked us to sign our names.

"Register here, please," was what he said.

"Register?" said Tish. "What for?"

"Like to have our guests' names," he said solemnly. "You'll find your cells all ready for you. Very nice ones—

view of the lake and everything. Front, show these ladies to their cells."

Aggie gave a low moan, but Tish motioned her to be silent.

"Am I to understand you are holding us here?"

"That's what we're here for. We specialize in holding, if you know what I mean."

"If it's that fish pier——"

"Is it the fish pier?" the young man asked of two or three men around; but nobody seemed to know.

Tish cast a desperate glance about her.

"I may have made a mistake," she said, "but would it mean anything to you if I said: 'Good evening, dearie'?"

"Why, it would mean a lot," he said politely. "Any term of—er—affection, you know. I'm a soft-hearted man in spite of my business."

But Tish was eying him, and now she leaned over the desk and asked very clearly:

"Have you got a closet where, neatly looped and tagged, You keep the sturdy symbols of the game you've bagged?"

Suddenly all the guards laughed, and so did the young man.

"Well, well!" he said. "So that's what brought you here, Miss Carberry? And all of us hoping you'd come for a nice little stay! Jim, take the ladies to the closet."

Well, what with the accident and the hard rowing, as well as this recent fright, neither Aggie nor I was able to accompany Tish. I cannot therefore speak with authority; but knowing Tish as I do, I do not believe that Mrs. Cummings' accusation as to what happened at this closet is based at all on facts.

Briefly, Mrs. Cummings insists that having taken out her own clue, Tish then placed on top of the others a number of similar envelopes containing cross-word puzzles, which caused a considerable delay, especially over the Arabic name for whirling dervishes. This not, indeed, being solved at all, somebody finally telephoned to Mr. Ostermaier to look it up in the encyclopaedia, and he then stated that no cross-word puzzles had been included among the clues. Whereupon the mistake was rectified and the hunt proceeded.

As I say, we did not go with Tish to the closet and so cannot be certain, but I do know that the clue she brought us was perfectly correct, as follows:

Password : "All is discovered."

"Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

"'Most anywhere else," said she.

"Behind the grille is a sweet young man,
And he'll give my clue to me."

We had no more than read it when we heard a great honking of horns outside, and those who had survived trooped in. But alas, what a pitiful remnant was left! Only ten cars now remained out of twenty. The Smith boys had not been heard of, and the Phillipses had been arrested for speeding. Also Mr. Gilbert had gone into a ditch and was having a cut on his chin sewed up, the Jenningses' car had had a flat tyre and was somewhere behind in the road, and the Johnstons were in Backwater Creek, waiting for a boat to come to their rescue.

And we had only just listened to this tale of woe when Mrs. Cummings sailed up to Tish with an unpleasant smile and something in her hand.

"Your scissors, I believe, dear Miss Carberry," she said. But Tish only eyed them stonily.

"Why should you think they are my scissors?" she inquired coldly.

"The eldest Smith boy told me to return them to you, with his compliments. He found them in the engine of his car."

"In his car? What were they doing there?"

"That's what I asked him. He said that you would know."

"Two pairs of scissors are as alike as two pairs of pants," Tish said calmly, and prepared to depart.

But our poor Aggie now stepped up and examined the things and began to sneeze with excitement.

"Why, Tish Carberry," she exclaimed, "they are your scissors! There's the broken point and everything. Well, if that isn't the strangest thing!"

"Extraordinary!" said Mrs. Cummings. "Personally, I think it a matter for investigation."

She then swept on, and we left the penitentiary. But once outside the extreme discomfort of our situation soon became apparent. Not only were we wet through, so that Aggie's sneezing was no longer alleviated by the clothes-pin, but Tish's

voice had become hardly more than a hoarse croaking. Also, we had no car in which to proceed. Indeed, apparently the treasure hunt was over as far as we were concerned. But once again I had not counted on Tish's resourcefulness. We had no sooner emerged than she stopped in the darkness and held up her hand.

"Listen!" she said.

The motor-cycle was approaching along the lake road, with that peculiar explosive sound so reminiscent of the machine-gun Tish had used in the capture of X—— during the war.

It was clear that we had but two courses of action—one to return to the penitentiary and seek sanctuary, the other to remain outside. And Tish, thinking rapidly, chose the second. She drew us into an embrasure of the great wall and warned us to be silent, especially Aggie.

"One sneeze," she said, "and that wretch will have us. You'll spend the night in jail."

"I'd rather be there than here any day," said Aggie, shivering. However, she tried the clothes-pin once more, and for a wonder it worked.

"He'll hear by teeth chatterig, I'b certaid," she whispered.

"Take them out," Tish ordered her, and she did so.

How strange, looking back, to think of the effect which that one small act was to have on the later events of the evening. How true it is that life is but a series of small deeds and great results! We turn to the left instead of the right and collide with an omnibus, or trip over the tail of an insignificant tea-gown, like my Cousin Sarah Pennell, and fall downstairs and break a priceless bottle of medicinal brandy.

So Aggie took out her teeth and placed them in her ulster pocket, and tied her scarf over her mouth to prevent taking cold without them, and later on . . .

However, at the moment we were concentrated on the policeman. First he discovered and apparently examined the boat on the shore, and then, pushing and grunting, shoved his machine past us and up to the road. There he left it, the engine still going, and went toward the penitentiary, whistling softly and plainly outlined against the lights of the cars outside. A moment later Tish had led us to the motor-cycle and was examining the mechanism by the aid of the flashlight.

"It looks easy enough," she said in her usual composed manner. "Lizzie, get into the side-car and take Aggie on your

lap—and hold on to her. I wish no repetition of the Miss Watkins incident.”

We watched for a short time, hoping the policeman would go inside; but he was talking to the Cummingses' chauffeur, who seemed to be pointing in our direction. Seeing then that no time was to be lost, Tish hastily adjusted her goggles and pulled down her hat, and being already in knickerbockers, got quickly into the saddle. With the first explosion of the engine the motor-cycle officer looked up, and an instant later began to run in our direction.

But I saw no more. Tish started the machine at full speed, and to a loud cry from Aggie we were off with a terrific jerk.

“By deck's broked!” she cried. “Stop her! By deck's broked!”

Her neck was not broken, however, I am happy to say, and the osteopath who is attending her promises that she will soon be able to turn her head.

How shall I describe the next brief interval of time? To those who have ridden in such fashion, no description is necessary; and to those who have not, words are inadequate. And, in addition, while it was speedily apparent that we were leaving our pursuers behind—for the Cummingses' car followed us for some distance, with the policeman on the running-board—it was also soon apparent that our dear Tish had entirely lost control of the machine.

Unable to turn her eyes from the road to examine the various controls, an occasional flash of lightning from an approaching storm showed her fumbling blindly with the mechanism. Farmhouses loomed up and were gone in an instant; on several curves the side-car was high in the air, and more than once our poor Aggie almost left us entirely. As the lightning became more frequent we could see frightened animals running across the fields; and finally, by an unfortunate swerve, we struck and went entirely through some unseen obstacle which later proved to be a fence.

However, what might have been a tragedy worked out to the best possible advantage, for, another flash revealing a large haystack near by, Tish turned the machine toward it with her usual far-sightedness and we struck it fairly in the centre. So great was our impact, indeed, that we penetrated it to a considerable distance and were almost buried, but we got out without difficulty and also extricated the machine. Save for

Aggie's neck, we were unhurt ; and, the rain coming up just then, we retired once more into the stack and with the aid of the flash again read over the clue :

"Where are you going, my pretty maid ?"

" 'Most anywhere else," said she.

"Behind the grille is a nice young man,
And he'll give my clue to me."

"Going ?" said Tish thoughtfully. "'Most anywhere else' ? There's no sense to that." The hay, however, had brought back Aggie's hay-fever, and as sneezing hurt her neck, she was utterly wretched.

"There's a heap of sedse," she said in a petulant voice. "Bost adywhere else would suit be all right. Ad if you're goig to try that dabbed bachide agaid, Tish Carberry, I ab dot."

"If you must swear, Aggie," Tish reproved her, "go outside, and do not pollute the clean and wholesome fragrance of this hay."

"I'd have said worse if I knew andythig worse," said Aggie. "And bebbe this hay is wholesobe, but if you had by dose you wouldn't thig so."

"Grille ?" said Tish. "A nice young man behind a grille ? Is there a grill-room at the Eden Inn ?"

But we could not remember any, and we finally hit on the all-night restaurant in town, which had.

" 'Most anywhere else' must refer to that," Tish said. "The food is probably extremely poor. And while there we can get a sandwich or so and eat it on the way. I confess to a feeling of weakness."

"Weakness !" said Aggie bitterly. "Thed I dod't ever wadt to see you goig strrog, Tish Carberry !"

It was owing to Aggie's insistence that Tish test out the mechanism of the motor-cycle before any of us mounted again that our next misfortune occurred. So far, when one thing failed us, at least we had been lucky enough to find a substitute at hand, but in this instance we were for a time at a loss.

It happened as follows : As soon as the rain ceased, Tish, flashlight in hand, went to the machine and made a few experiments with it. At first all went well, but suddenly something happened, I know not what, and in a second the motor-cycle had darted out of our sight and soon after out of

hearing, leaving our dear Tish still with a hand out and me holding a flashlight on the empty air. Pursuit was useless, and, after a few moments, inadvisable, for as it reached the main road it apparently struck something with extreme violence.

"If that's a house it's docked it dowsd," Aggie wailed.

But as we were to learn later, it had not struck a house, but something far more significant. Of that also more later on.

Our situation now was extremely unpleasant. Although the storm was over, it was almost eleven o'clock, and at any time we expected to see the other cars dashing past toward victory. To walk back to town was out of the question in the condition of Aggie's neck. Yet what else could we do? However, Tish had not exhausted all her resources.

"We are undoubtedly on a farm," she said. "Where there's a farm there's a horse, and where there's a horse there is a wagon. I am not through yet."

And so, indeed, it turned out to be. We had no particular mischance in the barn, where we found both a horse and a wagon, only finding it necessary to connect the two.

This we accomplished in what I fear was but an eccentric manner, and soon we were on our way once more, Aggie lying flat in the wagon-bed because of her neck. How easy to pen this line, yet to what unforeseen consequences it was to lead!

As we wished to avoid the spot where the motor-cycle had struck something, we took back-lanes by choice, and after travelling some three miles or so had the extraordinary experience of happening on the motor-cycle itself once more, comfortably settled in a small estuary of the lake and with several water-fowl already roosting upon it.

But we reached the town safely, and leaving Aggie, now fast asleep, in the rear of the wagon, entered the all-night restaurant.

V

There was no actual grille to be seen in this place, but a stout individual in a dirty-white apron was frying sausages on a stove at the back end and a thin young man at a table was waiting to eat them.

Tish lost no time, but hurried back, and this haste of hers added to the dirt and so on with which she was covered and

the huskiness of her voice, undoubtedly precipitated the climax which immediately followed. Breathless as she was, she leaned to him and said :

“ ‘All is discovered.’ ”

“The hell you say !” said the man, dropping the fork.

“I’ve told you,” she repeated. “ ‘All is discovered.’ And now no funny business. Give me what you’ve got ; I’m in a hurry.”

“Give you what I’ve got ?” he repeated. “You know damn’ well I haven’t got anything, and what I’m going to get is twenty years ! Where are the others ?”

Well, Tish had looked rather blank at first, but at that she brightened up.

“In the penitentiary,” she said. “At least——”

“In the pen !” yelled the man. “Here, Jose !” he called to the person at the table. “It’s all up ! Quick’s the word !”

“Not at all,” said Tish. “I was to say ‘All is discovered’, and——”

But he only groaned, and throwing off his apron and grabbing a hat, the next moment he had turned out the lights and the two of them ran out the front door. Tish and I remained in the darkness, too astonished to speak, until a sound outside brought us to our senses.

“Good heavens, Lizzie !” she cried. “They have taken the wagon—and Aggie’s in it !”

We ran outside, but it was too late to do anything. The horse was galloping wildly up the street, and after following it a block or two, we were obliged to desist. I leaned against a lamp-post and burst into tears, but Tish was made of stronger fibre. While others mourn, Tish acts, and in this case she acted at once.

As it happened, we were once more at Dr. Parkinson’s, and even as we stood there the doctor himself brought his car out of the garage, and leaving it at the kerb, limped into his house for something he had forgotten. He was wearing a pair of loose bedroom slippers, and did not see us at first, but when he did he stopped.

“Still at large, are you ?” he said in an unpleasant tone.

“Not through any fault of yours,” said Tish, glaring at him. “After your dastardly attack on us——”

“Attack !” he shouted. “Who’s limping, you or me ? I’m going to lose two toenails, and possibly more. I warn you,

whoever you are, I've told the police, and they are on your track."

"Then they are certainly travelling some," said Tish coldly.

He then limped into the house, and Tish caught me by the arm.

"Into the car!" she whispered. "He deserves no consideration whatever, and our first duty is to Aggie."

Before I could protest, I was in the car and Tish was starting the engine; but precious time had been lost, and although we searched madly, there was no trace of the wagon.

When at last in despair we drove up to the local police-station it was as a last resort. But like everything else that night, it too failed us. The charge room was empty, and someone was telephoning from the inner room to Edgewater, the next town.

"Say," he was saying, "has the sheriff and his crowd started yet? . . . Have, eh? Well, we need 'em. All the boys are out, but they haven't got 'em yet, so far's I know. . . . Yes, they've done plenty: Attacked Dr. Parkinson first. Then busted down the pier at the fish-house and stole a boat there, and just as Murphy corralled them near the pen, they grabbed his motor-cycle and escaped. They hit a car with it and about killed a man, and a few minutes ago old Jenkins, out the Pike, telephoned they'd lifted a horse and wagon and beat it. And now they've looted the Cummings house and stolen Parkinson's car for a getaway. . . . Crazy? Sure they're crazy! Called the old boy at the fish-cannery 'dearie'! Can you beat it?"

We had just time to withdraw to the street before he came through the door-way, and getting into the car we drove rapidly away. Never have I seen Tish more irritated; the unfairness of the statements galled her, and still more her inability to refute them. She said but little, merely hoping that whoever had robbed the Cummings house had made a complete job of it, and that we would go next to the railway station.

"It is possible," she said, "that the men in that restaurant are implicated in this burglary, and certainly their actions indicate flight. In that case the wagon—and Aggie—may be at the depot."

This thought cheered us both. But, alas, the waiting-room was empty and no wagon stood near the tracks. Only young

George Welliver was behind the ticket window, and to him Tish related a portion of the situation.

"Not only is Miss Pilkington in the wagon," she said, "but these men are probably concerned in the Cummings robbery. I merely said to them 'All is discovered', when they rushed out of the place."

Suddenly George Welliver threw back his head and laughed.

"Well!" he said. "And me believing you all the time! So you're one of that bunch, are you? All that rigmarole kind of mixed me up. Here's your little clue, and you're the first to get one."

He then passed out an envelope, and Tish, looking bewildered, took it and opened it. It was the next clue, right enough. The password was "Three-toed South American sloth", and the clue as follows:

Wives of great men all remind us,
We can make our wives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

"That ought not to be difficult," said Tish. "If only Aggie hadn't acted like a fool——"

"It's the cemetery," I said, "and I go to no cemetery tonight, Tish Carberry."

"Nonsense!" said Tish briskly. "Time certainly means a clock. I'm just getting the hang of this thing, Lizzie."

"'Hang' may be right before we're through. And when I think of poor Aggie——"

"Still," she went on, "sands might be an hour-glass. Sands of time, you know."

"And if somebody broke it by stepping on it, it would be footprints on the sands of time!" I retorted. "Go on! All we have to do is to find an hour-glass and step on it. And in the meantime Aggie——"

However, at that instant a train drew in and a posse from Edgewater, heavily armed, got out of it and made for a line of waiting motor-cars. Never have I seen a more ruthless-looking lot of men, and Tish felt as I did, for as they streamed into the waiting-room she pushed me into a telephone-booth and herself took another.

And with her usual competency she took advantage of

the fact to telephone Hannah to see if Aggie had returned home; but she had not.

As soon as the posse had passed through we made our escape by the other door and were able to reach the doctor's car unseen, and still free to pursue our search. But I insist that I saw Tish scatter no tacks along the street as we left the depot. If she did, then I must also insist that she had full reason; it was done to prevent an unjustified pursuit by a body of armed men, and not to delay the other treasure hunters.

Was it her fault that the other treasure seekers reached the station at that time? No, and again no. Indeed, when the first explosive noises came as the cars drew up she fully believed that the sheriff was firing on us, and it was in turning a corner at that time that she broke the fire-plug.

Certainly to assess her damages for flooded cellars is, under these circumstances, a real injustice.

But to return to the narrative: Quite rightly, once beyond pursuit, Tish headed for the Cummings property, as it was possible that there we could pick up some clue to Aggie, as well as establish our own innocence. But never shall I forget our reception at that once-friendly spot.

As the circumstances were peculiar, Tish decided to reconnoitre first, and entered the property through a hedge with the intention of working past the sundial and so towards the house. But hardly had she emerged into the glow from the windows when a shot was fired at her and she was compelled to retire. As it happened, she took the shortest cut to where she had left me, which was down the drive, and I found myself exposed to a fusillade of bullets, which compelled me to seek cover on the floor of the car. Two of the car windows were broken at once and Letitia Carberry herself escaped by a miracle, as a bullet went entirely through the envelope she held in her hand.

Yes, with her customary astuteness she had located the fresh clue. The Ostermaier boy had had them by the sundial, and had gone to sleep there. She fell over him in the darkness, as a matter of fact, and it was his yell which had aroused the house afresh.

There was clearly nothing to do but to escape at once, as men were running down the drive and firing as they ran. And as it seemed to make no difference in which direction we went, we droye more or less at random while I examined

the new clue. On account of the bullet-holes, it was hard to decipher, but it read much as follows :

The password was "Keep your head down, boy," and the clue was as follows :

Search where affection ceases,
By soft and ——— sands.
The digit it increases,
On its head it stands.

"After all," Tish said, "we have tried to help Aggie and failed. If that thing made sense I would go on and locate the treasure. But it doesn't. A digit is a finger, and how can it stand on its head?"

"A digit is a number too."

"So I was about to observe," said Tish. "If you wouldn't always break in on my train of thought, I'd get somewhere. And six upside down is nine, so it's six we're after. Six what? Six is half a dozen. Half a dozen eggs; half a dozen rolls; half a dozen children. Who has half a dozen children? That's it probably. I'm sure affection would cease with six children."

"Somebody along the water-front. It says: 'By soft and something-or-other sands.'"

We pondered the matter for some time in a narrow lane near the Country Club, but without result; and might have been there yet had not the sudden passing of a car which sounded like the Smith boys' flivver toward the Country Club gate stimulated Tish's imagination.

"I knew it would come!" she said triumphantly. "The sixth tee, of course, and the sand-box! And those dratted boys are ahead of us!"

Anyone but Tish, I am convinced, would have abandoned hope at that moment. But with her, emergencies are to be met and conquered, and so now. With a "Hold tight, Lizzie!" she swung the car about, and before I knew what was on the tapis she had let in the clutch and we were shooting off the road and across a ditch.

VI

So great was our momentum that we fairly leaped the depression, and the next moment were breaking our way

through a small wood which is close to the fourteenth hole of the golf-links, and had struck across the course at that point. Owing to the recent rain, the ground was soft, and at one time we were fairly brought to bay—on, I think, the fairway to the eleventh hole, sinking very deep. But we kept on the more rapidly, as we could now see the lights of the stripped flivver winding along the bridle-path which intersects the links.

I must say that the way the greens committee has acted in this matter has been a surprise to us. The wagon did a part of the damage, and also the course is not ruined. A few days' work with a wheelbarrow and spade will repair all damage; and as to the missing cup at the eighth hole, did we put the horse's foot in it?

Tish's eyes were on the lights of the flivver now winding its way along the road through the course, and it is to that that I lay our next and almost fatal mishap. For near the tenth hole she did not notice a sand-pit just ahead, and a moment later we had leaped the bunker at the top and shot down into it.

So abrupt was the descent that the lamps—and, indeed, the entire fore part of the doctor's car—were buried in the sand, and both of us were thrown entirely out. It was at this time that Tish injured one of her floating ribs, as before mentioned, and sustained the various injuries which laid her up for some time afterward, but at the moment she said nothing at all. Leaping to her feet, she climbed out of the pit and disappeared into the night, leaving me in complete darkness to examine myself for fractures and to sustain the greatest fright of my life. For as I sat up I realized that I had fallen across something, and that the something was a human being. Never shall I forget the sensations of that moment, nor the smothered voice beneath me which said:

"Kill be at odce ad be dode with it," and then sneezed violently.

"Aggie!" I shrieked.

She seemed greatly relieved at my voice, and requested me to move so she could get her head out of the sand. "Ad dod't screab agaid," she said pettishly. "They'll cobe back ad fidish us all if you do."

Well, it appeared that the two men had driven straight to the golf-links with the wagon, and had turned in much

as we had done. They had not known that Aggie was in the rear, and at first she had not been worried, thinking that Tish and I were in the seat. But finally she had learned her mistake, and that they were talking about loot from some place or other, and she was greatly alarmed. They were going too fast for her to escape, although once or twice they had struck bunkers which nearly threw her out.

But at last they got into the sand-pit, and as the horse climbed up the steep ascent our poor Aggie had heard her teeth drop out of her pocket and had made a frantic clutch at them. The next moment she had alighted on her head in the sand-pit and the wagon had gone on.

She was greatly shaken by her experience and had taken a heavy cold; but although we felt about for the blackberry cordial, we could not find it, and could only believe it had miraculously remained in the wagon.

As she finished her narrative our dear Tish slipped quietly over the edge of the pit and sat down, panting, in the sand. The storm being definitely over and a faint moon now showing, we perceived that she carried in her hand a canvas sack tied with a strong cord, and from its weight as she dropped it we knew that at last we had the treasure.

It was a great moment, and both Aggie and I then set about searching for the missing teeth. But as Tish learned of Aggie's experience she grew thoughtful.

"Undoubtedly," she said, "those two men are somehow concerned in this robbery tonight, and very probably the rendezvous of the gang is somewhere hereabouts. In which direction did they go, Aggie?"

"They've parked the wagon over id those woods."

"Then," said Tish, "it is our clear duty——"

"To go hobe," said Aggie sharply.

"Home nothing!" said Tish. "Gaol is where we go unless we get them. There are fifteen policemen and a sheriff coming for us at this minute, and——" But here she stopped and listened intently. "It is too late," she said, with the first discouragement she had shown all evening. "Too late, my friends. The police are coming now."

Aggie wailed dismally, but Tish hushed her and we set ourselves to listen. Certainly there were men approaching, and talking in cautious tones. There was a moment when I thought our dear Tish was conquered at last, but only a

moment. Then she roused to incisive speech and quick action.

"I do not propose to be dug out of here like a golf-ball," she stated. "I am entitled to defend myself and I shall do so. Lizzie, see if there are any tools in the car there, and get a wrench." She then took a firm hold of the treasure-bag and swung it in her hand. "I am armed," she said quietly, "and prepared for what may come. Aggie, get the clothes-pin, and when I give the word point it like a pistol."

"Ab I to say 'bag'?"

But before Tish could reply, the men were fairly on us. We had but time to get behind the car when we could hear their voices. And suddenly Aggie whispered, "It's theb! It's the badits! Ad they've beed at the cordial!"

And Aggie was right; they had indeed, as we could tell by their voices.

"It wash Bill, all righ'," said one man. "I shaw the litsh of hish car."

"Well, wheresh he gone to? No car here, no anything. Black ash hell."

One of them then began to sing a song in which he requested a barman to give him a drink, but was quickly hushed by the others, for there were now three of them. Whether it was this one or not I do not know, but at that instant one of them fell over the bunker at the top of the pit and came rolling down at our feet, and Tish, with her customary readiness, at once struck him on the head with the bag of pennies. He was evidently stunned, for he lay perfectly still, and the men above seemed puzzled.

"Hey, Joe!" they called. "Where are you?"

On receiving no reply, one of them lighted a match, and Tish had only time to retire behind the car before it flared up.

"Well, can you beat that? He'sh broken hish neck!"

But the man with the match was sober, and he saw the car and stared at it.

"If that's Bill's car," he said, as the match went out, "we're up against it. Only—where the devil's Bill?"

"He'sh dead too, mosht likely," said the other. "Everybody'sh dead. S'terrible night. Car'sh dead too; buried in a shea of shand. Shinking rapidly. Poor ole car! Women and children first!"

He then burst into tears and sat down apparently, for the other man kicked him and told him to get up, and then came sliding into the pit and bent over Joe, striking another match as he did so. Hardly had he done so when Tish's weapon again descended with full force, and he fell beside his unconscious partner in crime.

We had now only the drunken man to deal with; and as Tish wished no more bloodshed, she managed him in a different manner.

In a word, she secured the towrope from the rear seat of the doctor's car and, leaving Aggie and myself to watch the others, climbed out and approached him from the rear. It was only the work of a moment to pinion his arms to his sides, and as Aggie immediately pointed her impromptu weapon and cried "Hads up!" he surrendered without a struggle. Having securely roped him, we then rolled him into the sand-pit with the others, who showed no signs of coming to.

Fatigued as we were by that time, and no further danger threatening for the moment, we rested for a brief time on the ground and ate a few macaroons which I had carried in a pocket against such an emergency. But by "we" I mean only Tish and myself, as poor Aggie was unable to do so—and, indeed, has been living on soft food ever since. Then retrieving the sack containing the Cummings jewels and silver which the burglars had been carrying, we prepared to carry our double treasure back to the town.

Here, however, I feel that our dear Tish made a tactical error, for after we had found the horse and wagon—in the undergrowth just beyond the seventh hole—instead of heading at once for the police-station she insisted on going first to the Ostermaiers'.

"It is," she said, examining her watch by the aid of the flashlight, "now only half past eleven, and we shall not be late if we hurry. After that I shall report to the police."

"And what is to prevent those wretches from coming to and escaping in the interval?" I asked dryly.

"True," Tish agreed. "Perhaps I would better go back and hit them again. But that would take time also."

In the end we compromised on Tish's original plan and set out once more. The trip back across the links was uneventful, save that on the eighth green the horse got a foot

into the hole and was only extricated with the cup still clinging to his foot.

We had no can-opener along, and it is quite possible that the ring of the tin later on on the macadam road led to our undoing. For we had no sooner turned away from the town toward the Ostermaiers' cottage on the beach than a policeman leaped out of the bushes and, catching the animal by the bridle, turned a lantern on us.

"Hey, Murphy!" he called. "Here they are! I've got 'em! Hands up, there!"

"Stand back!" said Tish in a peremptory voice. "We are late enough already."

"Late!" said the policeman, pointing a revolver at us. "Well, time won't make much difference to you from now on—not where you're going. You won't ever need to hurry again."

"But I must deliver this treasure. After that I'll explain everything."

"You bet you'll deliver it, and right here and now. And your weapons too."

"Aggie, give up your clothes-pin," said Tish in a resigned voice. "These yokels apparently think us guilty of something or other, but my conscience is clear. If you want the really guilty parties," she told the policeman, "go back to the sand-pit by the tenth hole and you will find them."

"April fool your own self," said the one called Murphy. "I've been following you for two hours and I don't trust you. You're too resourceful. Is the stuff there?" he asked the first man, who had been searching in the wagon.

"All here."

"Then we'll be moving along," he said; and in this fashion did we reach the town once more, and the police-station.

Never shall I forget that moment. Each of us handcuffed and hustled along by the officers, we were shoved into the police-station in a most undignified manner, to confront the sheriff and a great crowd of people. Nor shall I ever forget the sheriff's face when he shouted in an angry voice:

"Women, by heck! When a woman goes wrong she sure goes!"

The place seemed to be crowded with people. The fish-pier man was there, and a farmer who said we had smashed

his feed-cutter. And Dr. Parkinson, limping about in his bedroom slippers and demanding to know where we had left his car, and another individual who claimed it was his horse we had taken, and that we'd put a tin can on his off forefoot and ought to be sued for cruelty to animals. And even Mr. Stubbs, because his licence plates were on our car—and of course the old fool had told all about it—and the Cummings butler, who pointed at Tish and said that after the alarm was raised she had tried to get back into the house again, which was, of course, ridiculous.

I must say it looked bad for us, especially when the crowd moved and we saw a man lying in a corner with an overcoat under his head and his eyes shut. Tish, who had not lost an ounce of dignity, gazed at him without expression.

"I dare say," she said, "that you claim that that is our work also."

"Just about killed him, you have," said the sheriff. "Went right through him with that motor-cycle you stole. Murder—that's what it's likely to be—murder. D'you get his name, Doctor?"

"Only roused enough to say it was Bill," said Dr. Parkinson. "I wish myself to lodge a complaint for assault and battery against these women. I am per——"

But Tish interrupted him.

"Bill?" she said. "Bill?"

Without a word she pushed the crowd aside, and, bending over Bill, with her poor manacled hands she examined him as best she could. Then she straightened herself and addressed the crowd with composure.

"Under this man's shirt," she said, "you will find what I imagine to be a full set of burglar's tools. If your hands are not paralysed like your brains, examine him and see."

And they found them! The picture of that moment is indelibly impressed on my mind—the sheriff holding up the tools and Tish addressing the mob with majesty and the indignation of outraged womanhood.

"Gentlemen, this is one of the gang which robbed the Cummings house tonight. Through all this eventful evening, during which I regret to say some of you have suffered, my friends and I have been on their track. Had the motor-cycle not wrecked that ruffian's car, they would now have safely escaped. As it is, when we were so unjustly arrested I had

but just recovered the Cummings silver and jewels, and alone and unaided had overcome the remainder of the gang. I am exhausted and weary; I have suffered physical injury and mental humiliation; but I am not too weak or too weary to go now to the sand-pit at the tenth hole on the golf-links and complete my evening's work by handing over to the police the three other villains I have captured."

"Three cheers for the old girl!" somebody called in the crowd. "I'm for her! Let's go!"

And this, I think, concludes the narrative of that evening's events. It was almost midnight when, our prisoners safely gaoled, we arrived at the Ostermaiers' to find all the treasure hunters except the Cummingses there and eating supper, and our angel-food cake gracing the centre of the table. Our dear Tish walked in and laid the sack of pennies on the table.

"Here is the treasure," she announced. "It has been an interesting evening, and I hope we shall soon do it again."

Mr. Ostermaier took up the bag and examined it.

"I have the honour of stating," he said, "that this, as Miss Carberry claims, is the treasure, and that Miss Carberry wins the hand-painted candlestick which is the prize for the event." He then examined the bag more carefully, and added:

"But this sack seems to be stained. Perhaps our good sister will explain what the stains are."

Tish eyed the bag with an expressionless face.

"Stains?" she said. "Oh yes, of course. I remember now. They are blood."

Then, leaving them staring and speechless with astonishment, she led the way out of the house, and home.

RELICS OF GENERAL CHASSÉ



ANTHONY TROLLOPE

ANTHONY TROLLOPE was for many years a Post Office Surveyor in Ireland, where he acquired the taste for hunting which is revealed in many of his stories. He was an indefatigable writer, publishing forty-seven novels, the majority of them with political or ecclesiastical settings. It is on the latter—the Barchester series—that his fame is principally based.

RELICS OF GENERAL CHASSÉ

A TALE OF ANTWERP

THAT Belgium is now one of the European kingdoms, living by its own laws, resting on its own bottom, with a king and court, palaces and parliament of its own, is known to all the world. And a very nice little kingdom it is ; full of old towns, fine Flemish pictures, and interesting Gothic churches. But in the memory of very many of us who do not think ourselves old men, Belgium, as it is now called—in those days it used to be Flanders and Brabant—was a part of Holland, and it obtained its own independence by a revolution. In that revolution the most important military step was the siege of Antwerp, which was defended on the part of the Dutch by General Chassé, with the utmost gallantry, but nevertheless ineffectually.

After the siege Antwerp became quite a show place ; and among the visitors who flocked there to talk of the gallant general, and to see what remained of the great effort which he had made to defend the place, were two Englishmen. One was the hero of this little history ; and the other was a young man of considerably less weight in the world. The less I say of the latter the better ; but it is necessary that I should give some description of the former.

The Rev. Augustus Horne was, at the time of my narrative, a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England. The profession which he had graced sat easily on him. Its external marks and signs were as pleasing to his friends as were its internal comforts to himself. He was a man of much quiet mirth, full of polished wit, and on some rare occasions he could descend to the more noisy hilarity of a joke. Loved by his friends, he loved all the world. He had known 'no care and seen no sorrow. Always intended for holy orders, he had entered them without a scruple, and remained within their

pale without a regret. At twenty-four he had been a deacon, at twenty-seven a priest, at thirty a rector, and at thirty-five a prebendary; and as his rectory was rich and his prebendal stall well paid, the Rev. Augustus Horne was called by all, and called himself, a happy man. His stature was about six feet two, and his corpulence exceeded even those bounds which symmetry would have preferred as being most perfectly compatible even with such a height. But nevertheless Mr. Horne was a well-made man; his hands and feet were small; his face was handsome, frank, and full of expression; his bright eyes twinkled with humour; his finely cut mouth disclosed two marvellous rows of well-preserved ivory; and his slightly aquiline nose was just such a projection as one would wish to see on the face of a well-fed, good-natured dignitary of the Church of England. When I add to all this that the reverend gentleman was as generous as he was rich—and the kind mother in whose arms he had been nurtured had taken care that he should never want—I need hardly say that I was blessed with a very pleasant travelling companion.

I must mention one more interesting particular. Mr. Horne was rather inclined to dandyism, in an innocent way. His clerical starched neckcloth was always of the whitest, his cambric handkerchief of the finest, his bands adorned with the broadest border; his sable suit never degenerated to a rusty brown; it not only gave on all occasions glossy evidence of freshness, but also of the talent which the artisan had displayed in turning out a well-dressed clergyman of the Church of England. His hair was ever brushed with scrupulous attention, and showed in its regular waves the guardian care of each separate bristle. And all this was done with that ease and grace which should be the characteristics of a dignitary of the established English Church.

I had accompanied Mr. Horne to the Rhine; and we had reached Brussels on our return, just at the close of that revolution which ended in affording a throne to the son-in-law of George the Fourth. At that moment General Chassé's name and fame were in every man's mouth, and, like other curious admirers of the brave, Mr. Horne determined to devote two days to the scene of the late events at Antwerp. Antwerp, moreover, possesses perhaps the finest spire, and certainly one of the three or four finest pictures, in the world. Of General Chassé, of the cathedral, and of the Rubens, I had

heard much, and was therefore well pleased that such should be his resolution. This accomplished, we were to return to Brussels; and thence, *via* Ghent, Ostend, and Dover, I to complete my legal studies in London, and Mr. Horne to enjoy once more the peaceful retirement of Ollerton rectory. As we were to be absent from Brussels but one night we were enabled to indulge in the gratification of travelling without our luggage. A small *sac-de-nuit* was prepared; brushes, combs, razors, strops, a change of linen, &c. &c., were carefully put up; but our heavy baggage, our coats, waistcoats, and other wearing apparel were unnecessary. It was delightful to feel oneself so light-handed. The reverend gentleman, with my humble self by his side, left the portal of the Hôtel de Belle Vue at 7 a.m., in good humour with all the world. There were no railroads in those days; but a cabriolet, big enough to hold six persons, with rope traces and corresponding appendages, deposited us at the "Golden Fleece" in something less than six hours. The inward man was duly fortified, and we started for the castle.

It boots not here to describe the effects which gunpowder and grape-shot had had on the walls of Antwerp. Let the curious in these matters read the horrors of the siege of Troy, or the history of Jerusalem taken by Titus. The one may be found in Homer, and the other in Josephus. Or if they prefer doings of a later date there is the taking of Sebastopol, as narrated in the columns of *The Times* newspaper. The accounts are equally true, instructive, and intelligible. In the meantime allow the Rev. Augustus Horne and myself to enter the private chambers of the renowned though defeated general.

We rambled for a while through the covered way, over the glacis and along the counterscarp, and listened to the guide as he detailed to us, in already accustomed words, how the siege had gone. Then we got into the private apartments of the general, and, having dexterously shaken off our attendant, wandered at large among the deserted rooms.

"It is clear that no one ever comes here," said I.

"No," said the Rev. Augustus; "it seems not; and to tell the truth, I don't know why anyone should come. The chambers in themselves are not attractive."

What he said was true. They were plain, ugly, square, unfurnished rooms, here a big one and there a little one, as is usual in most houses;—unfurnished, that is, for the most

part. In one place we did find a table and a few chairs, in another a bedstead, and so on. But to me it was pleasant to indulge in those ruminations which any traces of the great or unfortunate create in softly sympathizing minds. For a time we communicated our thoughts to each other as we roamed free as air through the apartments ; and then I lingered for a few moments behind, while Mr. Horne moved on with a quicker step.

At last I entered the bedchamber of the general, and there I overtook my friend. He was inspecting, with much attention, an article of the great man's wardrobe which he held in his hand. It was precisely that virile habiliment to which a well-known gallant captain alludes in his conversation with the posthumous appearance of Miss Bailey, as containing a Bank of England 5*l.* note.

"The general must have been a large man, George, or he would hardly have filled these," said Mr. Horne, holding up to the light the respectable leathern articles in question. "He must have been a very large man,—the largest man in Antwerp, I should think ; or else his tailor has done him more than justice."

They were certainly large, and had about them a charming regimental military appearance. They were made of white leather, with bright metal buttons at the knees and bright metal buttons at the top. They owned no pockets, and were, with the exception of the legitimate outlet, continuous in the circumference of the waistband. No dangling strings gave them an appearance of senile imbecility. Were it not for a certain rigidity, sternness, and mental inflexibility—we will call it military ardour—with which they were imbued, they would have created envy in the bosom of a fox-hunter.

Mr. Horne was no fox-hunter, but still he seemed to be irresistibly taken with the lady-like propensity of wishing to wear them. "Surely, George," he said, "the general must have been a stouter man than I am"—and he contemplated his own proportions with complacency—"these what's-the-names are quite big enough for me."

I differed in opinion, and was obliged to explain that I thought he did the good living of Ollerton insufficient justice.

"I am sure they are large enough for me," he repeated, with considerable obstinacy. I smiled incredulously, and then

to settle the matter he resolved that he would try them on. Nobody had been in these rooms for the last hour, and it appeared as though they were never visited. Even the guide had not come on with us, but was employed in showing other parties about the fortifications. It was clear that this portion of the building was left desolate, and that the experiment might be safely made. So the sportive rector declared that he would for a short time wear the regimentals which had once contained the valorous heart of General Chassé.

With all decorum the Rev. Mr. Horne divested himself of the work of the London artist's needle, and, carefully placing his own garments beyond the reach of dust, essayed to fit himself in military garb.

At that important moment—at the critical instant of the attempt—the clatter of female voices was heard approaching the chamber. They must have suddenly come round some passage corner, for it was evident by the sound that they were close upon us before we had any warning of their advent. At this very minute Mr. Horne was somewhat embarrassed in his attempts, and was not fully in possession of his usual active powers of movement, nor of his usual presence of mind. He only looked for escape; and seeing a door partly open he with difficulty retreated through it, and I followed him. We found that we were in a small dressing-room; and as by good luck the door was defended by an inner bolt, my friend was able to protect himself.

"There shall be another siege, at any rate as stout as the last, before I surrender," said he.

As the ladies seemed inclined to linger in the room it became a matter of importance that the above-named articles should fit, not only for ornament but for use. It was very cold, and Mr. Horne was altogether unused to move in a Highland sphere of life. But alas, alas! General Chassé had not been nurtured in the classical retirement of Ollerton. The ungiving leather would stretch no point to accommodate the divine, though it had been willing to minister to the convenience of the soldier. Mr. Horne was vexed and chilled; and throwing the now hateful garments into a corner and protecting himself from the cold as best he might by standing with his knees together and his body somewhat bent so as to give the skirts of his coat an opportunity of doing extra duty, he begged me to see if those jabbering females were not going to leave him

in peace to recover his own property. I accordingly went to the door, and opening it to a small extent I peeped through.

Who shall describe my horror at the sight which I then saw? The scene, which had hitherto been tinted with comic effect, was now becoming so decidedly tragic that I did not dare at once to acquaint my worthy pastor with that which was occurring,—and, alas! had already occurred.

Five country-women of our own—it was easy to know them by their dress and general aspect—were standing in the middle of the room; and one of them, the centre of the group, the senior of the lot, a maiden lady—I could have sworn to that—with a red nose, held in one hand a huge pair of scissors and in the other—the already devoted goods of my most unfortunate companion! Down from the waistband, through that goodly expanse, a fell gash had already gone through and through; and in useless, unbecoming disorder the broadcloth fell pendent from her arm on this side and on that. At that moment I confess that I had not the courage to speak to Mr. Horne,—not even to look at him.

I must describe that group. Of the figure next to me I could only see the back. It was a broad back done up in silk not of the newest. The whole figure, one may say, was dumpy. The black silk was not long, as dresses now are worn, nor wide in its skirts. In every way it was skimpy, considering the breadth it had to cover; and below the silk I saw the heels of two thick shoes, and enough to swear by of two woollen stockings. Above the silk was a red-and-blue shawl; and above that a ponderous, elaborate brown bonnet, as to the materials of which I should not wish to undergo an examination. Over and beyond this I could only see the backs of her two hands. They were held up as though in wonder at that which the red-nosed holder of the scissors had dared to do.

Opposite to this lady, and with her face fully turned to me, was a kindly-looking, fat motherly woman, with light-coloured hair not in the best order. She was hot and scarlet with exercise, being perhaps too stout for the steep steps of the fortress; and in one hand she held a handkerchief, with which from time to time she wiped her brow. In the other hand she held one of the extremities of my friend's property, feeling—good, careful soul!—what was the texture of the cloth. As she did so, I could see a glance of approbation pass across her warm features. I liked that lady's face, in spite of her untidy

hair, and felt that had she been alone my friend would not have been injured.

On either side of her there stood a flaxen-haired maiden, with long curls, large blue eyes, fresh red cheeks, an undefined lumpy nose, and large good-humoured mouth. They were as like as two peas, only that one was half an inch taller than the other; and there was no difficulty in discovering, at a moment's glance, that they were the children of that overheated matron who was feeling the web of my friend's cloth.

But the principal figure was she who held the centre place in the group. She was tall and thin, with fierce-looking eyes rendered more fierce by the spectacles which she wore; with a red nose as I said before; and about her an undescribable something which quite convinced me that she had never known—could never know—aught of the comforts of married life. It was she who held the scissors and the black garments. It was she who had given that unkind cut. As I looked at her she whisked herself quickly round from one companion to the other, triumphing in what she had done, and ready to triumph further in what she was about to do. I immediately conceived a deep hatred for that Queen of the Harpies.

"Well, I suppose they can't be wanted again," said the mother, rubbing her forehead.

"Oh, dear, no!" said she of the red nose. "They are relics!"

I thought to leap forth; but for what purpose should I have leaped? The accursed scissors had already done their work; and the symmetry, nay, even the utility of the vestment was destroyed.

"General Chassé wore a very good article;—I will say that for him," continued the mother.

"Of course he did!" said the Queen Harpy. "Why should he not, seeing that the country paid for it for him? Well, ladies, who's for having a bit?"

"Oh, my! you won't go for to cut them up," said the stout back.

"Won't I?" said the scissors; and she immediately made another incision. "Who's for having a bit? Don't all speak at once."

"I should like a morsel for a pin-cushion," said flaxen-haired Miss No. 1, a young lady about nineteen, actuated by a general affection for all sword-bearing, fire-eating heroes. "I

should like to have something to make me think of the poor general !”

Snip, snip went the scissors with professional rapidity, and a round piece was extracted from the back of the calf of the left leg. I shuddered with horror ; and so did the Rev. Augustus Horne with cold.

“I hardly think it’s proper to cut them up,” said Miss No. 2.

“Oh, isn’t it ?” said the harpy. “Then I’ll do what’s improper !” And she got her finger and thumb well through the holes in the scissors’ handles. As she spoke resolution was plainly marked on her brow.

“Well, if they are to be cut up, I should certainly like a bit for a pen-wiper,” said No. 2. No. 2. was a literary young lady with a periodical correspondence, a journal, and an album. Snip, snip went the scissors again, and the broad part of the upper right division afforded ample materials for a pen-wiper.

Then the lady with the back, seeing that the desecration of the article had been completed, plucked up heart of courage and put in her little request : “I think I might have a needle-case out of it,” said she, “just as a *surviveur* of the poor general”—and a long fragment cut rapidly out of the waistband afforded her unqualified delight.

Mamma, with the hot face and untidy hair, came next. “Well, girls,” she said, “as you are all served, I don’t see why I’m to be left out. Perhaps, Miss Grogram”—she was an old maid, you see—“perhaps, Miss Grogram, you could get me as much as would make a decent-sized reticule.”

There was not the slightest difficulty in doing this. The harpy in the centre again went to work, snip, snip, and extracting from that portion of the affairs which usually sustained the greater portion of Mr. Horne’s weight two large round pieces of cloth, presented them to the well-pleased matron. “The general knew well where to get a bit of good broadcloth, certainly,” said she, again feeling the pieces.

“And now for No. 1,” said she whom I so absolutely hated ; “I think there is still enough for a pair of slippers. There’s nothing so nice for the house as good black cloth slippers that are warm to the feet and don’t show the dirt.” And so saying, she spread out on the floor the lacerated remainders.

“There’s a nice bit there,” said young lady No. 2, poking at one of the pockets with the end of her parasol.

"Yes," said the harpy, contemplating her plunder. "But I'm thinking whether I couldn't get leggings as well. I always wear leggings in the thick of the winter." And so she concluded her operations, and there was nothing left but a melancholy skeleton of seams and buttons.

All this having been achieved, they pocketed their plunder and prepared to depart. There are people who have a wonderful appetite for relics. A stone with which Washington had broken a window when a boy—with which he had done so or had not, for there is little difference ; a button that was on a coat of Napoleon's, or on that of one of his lackeys ; a bullet said to have been picked up at Waterloo or Bunker's Hill ; these and suchlike things are great treasures. And their most desirable characteristic is the ease with which they are attained. Any bullet or any button does the work. Faith alone is necessary. And now these ladies had made themselves happy and glorious with "relics" of General Chassé cut from the ill-used habiliments of an elderly English gentleman !

They departed at last, and Mr. Horne, for once in an ill-humour, followed me into the bedroom. Here I must be excused if I draw a veil over his manly sorrow at discovering what fate had done for him. Remember what was his position, unclothed in the castle of Antwerp ! The nearest suitable change for those which had been destroyed was locked up in his portmanteau at the Hôtel de Belle Vue in Brussels ! He had nothing left to him—literally nothing, in that Antwerp world. There was no other wretched being wandering then in that Dutch town so utterly denuded of the goods of life. For what is a man fit—for what can he be fit—when left in such a position ? There are some evils which seem utterly to crush a man ; and if there be any misfortune to which a man may be allowed to succumb without imputation on his manliness, surely it is such as this. How was Mr. Horne to return to his hotel without incurring the displeasure of the municipality ? That was my first thought.

He had a cloak, but it was at the inn ; and I found that my friend was oppressed with a great horror at the idea of being left alone ; so that I could not go in search of it. There is an old saying, that no man is a hero to his *valet de chambre*,—the reason doubtless being this, that it is customary for his valet to see the hero divested of those trappings in which so much

of the heroic consists. Who reverences a clergyman without his gown, or a warrior without his sword and *sabre-tasche*? What would even Minerva be without her helmet?

I do not wish it to be understood that I no longer revered Mr. Horne because he was in an undress; but he himself certainly lost much of his composed, well-sustained dignity of demeanour. He was fearful and querulous, cold, and rather cross. When, forgetting his size, I offered him my own he thought that I was laughing at him. He began to be afraid that the story would get abroad, and he then and there exacted a promise that I would never tell it during his lifetime. I have kept my word; but now my old friend has been gathered to his fathers, full of years.

At last I got him to the hotel. It was long before he would leave the castle, cloaked though he was; not, indeed, till the shades of evening had dimmed the outlines of men and things, and made indistinct the outward garniture of those who passed to and fro in the streets. Then, wrapped in his cloak, Mr. Horne followed me along the quays and through the narrowest of the streets; and at length, without venturing to return the gaze of anyone in the hotel court, he made his way up to his own bedroom.

Dinnerless and supperless he went to his couch. But when there he did consent to receive some consolation in the shape of mutton cutlets and fried potatoes, a savoury omelet, and a bottle of claret. The mutton cutlets and fried potatoes at the "Golden Fleece" at Antwerp are—or were then, for I am speaking now of well-nigh thirty years since—remarkably good; the claret, also, was of the best; and so, by degrees, the look of despairing dismay passed from his face, and some scintillations of the old fire returned to his eyes.

"I wonder whether they find themselves much happier for what they have got?" said he.

"A great deal happier," said I. "They'll boast of those things to all their friends at home, and we shall doubtless see some account of their success in the newspapers."

"It would be delightful to expose their blunder—to show them up. Would it not, George? To turn the tables on them?"

"Yes," said I. "I should like to have the laugh against them."

"So would I, only that I should compromise myself by

telling the story. It wouldn't do at all to have it told at Oxford with my name attached to it."

To this also I assented. To what would I not have assented in my anxiety to make him happy after his misery?

But all was not over yet. He was in bed now, but it was necessary that he should rise again on the morrow. At home, in England, what was required might perhaps have been made during the night; but here, among the slow Flemings, any such exertion would have been impossible. Mr. Horne, moreover, had no desire to be troubled in his retirement by a tailor.

Now the landlord of the "Golden Fleece" was a very stout man—a very stout man indeed. Looking at him as he stood with his hands in his pockets at the portal of his own establishment, I could not but think that he was stouter even than Mr. Horne. But then he was certainly much shorter, and the want of due proportion probably added to his unwieldy appearance. I walked round him once or twice wishfully, measuring him in my eye, and thinking of what texture might be the Sunday best of such a man. The clothes which he then had on were certainly not exactly suited to Mr. Horne's tastes.

He saw that I was observing him, and appeared uneasy and offended. I had already ascertained that he spoke a little English. Of Flemish I knew literally nothing, and in French, with which probably he was also acquainted, I was by no means voluble. The business which I had to transact was intricate, and I required the use of my mother-tongue.

It was intricate and delicate, and difficult withal. I began by remarking on the weather, but he did not take my remarks kindly. I am inclined to fancy that he thought I was desirous of borrowing money from him. At any rate he gave me no encouragement in my first advances.

"Vat misfortune?" at last he asked, when I had succeeded in making him understand that a gentleman upstairs required his assistance.

"He has lost these things," and I took hold of my own garments. "It's a long story, or I'd tell you how; but he has not a pair in the world till he gets back to Brussels—unless you can lend him one."

"Lost hees br——?" and he opened his eyes wide, and looked at me with astonishment.

"Yes, yes, exactly so," said I, interrupting him. "Most astonishing thing, isn't it? But it's quite true."

"Vas hees money in de pocket?" asked my suspicious landlord.

"No, no, no. It's not so bad as that. His money is all right. I had the money, luckily."

"Ah, dat is better! But he have lost hees b——?"

"Yes, yes"; I was now getting rather impatient. "There is no mistake about it. He has lost them as sure as you stand there." And then I proceeded to explain that as the gentleman in question was very stout, and as he, the landlord, was stout also, he might assist us in this great calamity by a loan from his own wardrobe.

When he found that the money was not in the pocket, and that his bill therefore would be paid, he was not indisposed to be gracious. He would, he said, desire his servant to take up what was required to Mr. Horne's chamber. I endeavoured to make him understand that a sombre colour would be preferable; but he only answered that he would put the best that he had at the gentleman's disposal. He could not think of offering anything less than his best on such an occasion. And then he turned his back and went his way, muttering as he went something in Flemish, which I believed to be an exclamation of astonishment that any man should, under any circumstances, lose such an article.

It was now getting late; so when I had taken a short stroll by myself, I went to bed without disturbing Mr. Horne again that night. On the following morning I thought it best not to go to him unless he sent for me; so I desired the boots to let him know that I had ordered breakfast in a private room, and that I would await him there unless he wished to see me. He sent me word back to say that he would be with me very shortly.

He did not keep me waiting above half an hour, but I confess that that half-hour was not pleasantly spent. I feared that his temper would be tried in dressing, and that he would not be able to eat his breakfast in a happy state of mind. So that when I heard his heavy footstep advancing along the passage my heart did misgive me, and I felt that I was trembling.

That step was certainly slower and more ponderous than usual. There was always a certain dignity in the very sound of his movements, but now this seemed to have been enhanced.

To judge merely by the step one would have said that a bishop was coming that way instead of a prebendary.

And then he entered. In the upper half of his august person no alteration was perceptible. The hair was as regular and as graceful as ever, the handkerchief was white, the coat as immaculate ; but below his well-filled waistcoat a pair of red plush began to shine in unmitigated splendour, and continued from thence down to within an inch above his knee ; nor, as it appeared, could any pulling induce them to descend lower. Mr. Horne always wore black silk stockings—at least so the world supposed—but it was now apparent that the world had been wrong in presuming him to be guilty of such extravagance. Those, at any rate, which he exhibited on the present occasion were more economical. They were silk to the calf, but thence upwards they continued their career in white cotton. These then followed the plush ; first two snowy, full-sized pillars of white, and then two jet columns of flossy silk. Such was the appearance, on that well-remembered morning, of the Rev. Augustus Horne, as he entered the room in which his breakfast was prepared.

I could see at a glance that a dark frown contracted his eyebrows, and that the compressed muscles of his upper lip gave a strange degree of austerity to his open face. He carried his head proudly on high, determined to be dignified in spite of his misfortunes, and advanced two steps into the room without a remark, as though he were able to show that neither red plush nor black cloth could disarrange the equal poise of his mighty mind !

And after all what are a man's garments but the outward husks in which the fruit is kept, duly tempered from the wind ?

The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.

And is not the tailor's art as little worthy, as insignificant as that of the king who makes

A marquis, duke, and a' that ?

Who would be content to think that his manly dignity depended on his coat and waistcoat, or his hold on the world's esteem on any other garment of usual wear ? That no such

weakness soiled his mind Mr. Horne was determined to prove ; and thus he entered the room with measured tread and stern dignified demeanour.

Having advanced two steps his eye caught mine. I do not know whether he was moved by some unconscious smile on my part ; for in truth I endeavoured to seem as indifferent as himself to the nature of his dress ; or whether he was invincibly tickled by some inward fancy of his own, but suddenly his advancing step ceased, a broad flash of comic humour spread itself over his features, he retreated with his back against the wall, and then burst out into an immoderate roar of loud laughter.

And I—what else could I then do but laugh ? He laughed, and I laughed. He roared, and I roared. He lifted up his vast legs to view till the rays of the morning sun shone through the window on the bright hues which he displayed ; and he did not sit down to his breakfast till he had in every fantastic attitude shown off to the best advantage the red plush of which he had so recently become proud.

An Antwerp private cabriolet on that day reached the yard of the Hôtel de Belle Vue at about 4 p.m., and four waiters, in a frenzy of astonishment, saw the Rev. Augustus Horne descend from the vehicle and seek his chamber dressed in the garments which I have described. But I am inclined to think that he never again favoured any of his friends with such a sight.

It was on the next evening after this that I went out to drink tea with two maiden ladies, relatives of mine, who kept a seminary for English girls at Brussels. The Misses Macmanus were very worthy women, and earned their bread in an upright, painstaking manner. I would not for worlds have passed through Brussels without paying them this compliment. They were, however, perhaps a little dull, and I was aware that I should not probably meet in their drawing-room many of the fashionable inhabitants of the city. Mr. Horne had declined to accompany me ; but in doing so he was good enough to express a warm admiration for the character of my worthy cousins.

The elder Miss Macmanus, in her little note, had informed me that she would have the pleasure of introducing me to a few of my "compatriots". I presumed she meant Englishmen ; and as I was in the habit of meeting such every day

of my life at home, I cannot say that I was peculiarly elevated by the promise. When, however, I entered the room, there was no Englishman there—there was no man of any kind. There were twelve ladies collected together with the view of making the evening pass agreeably to me, the single virile being among them all. I felt as though I were a sort of Mohammed in Paradise; but I certainly felt also that the Paradise was none of my own choosing.

In the centre of the amphitheatre which the ladies formed sat the two Misses Macmanus—there, at least, they sat when they had completed the process of shaking hands with me. To the left of them, making one wing of the semicircle, were arranged the five pupils by attending to whom the Misses Macmanus earned their living; the other wing consisted of the five ladies who had furnished themselves with relics of General Chassé. They were my “compatriots”.

I was introduced to them all, one after the other; but their names did not abide in my memory one moment. I was thinking too much of the singularity of the adventure, and could not attend to such minutiae. That the red-nosed harpy was Miss Grogram, that I remembered; that, I may say, I shall never forget. But whether the motherly lady with the somewhat blowsy hair was Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Green or Mrs. Walker, I cannot now say. The dumpy female with the broad back was always called Aunt Sally by the young ladies.

Too much sugar spoils one's tea; I think I have heard that even prosperity will cloy when it comes in overdoses; and a schoolboy has been known to be overdone with jam. I myself have always been peculiarly attached to ladies' society, and have avoided bachelor parties as things execrable in their very nature. But on this special occasion I felt myself to be that schoolboy—I was literally overdone with jam. My tea was all sugar, so that I could not drink it. I was one among twelve. What could I do or say? The proportion of alloy was too small to have any effect in changing the nature of the virgin silver, and the conversation became absolutely feminine.

I must confess also that my previous experience as to these compatriots of mine had not prejudiced me in their favour. I regarded them with—I am ashamed to say so, seeing that they were ladies—but almost with loathing. When last I had seen them their occupation had reminded me of some obscene feast of harpies, or almost of ghouls. They had brought down to the

verge of desperation the man whom of all men I most venerated. On these accounts I was inclined to be taciturn with reference to them—and then what could I have to say to the Misses Macmanus's five pupils?

My cousin at first made an effort or two in my favour, but these efforts were fruitless. I soon died away into utter unrecognized insignificance, and the conversation, as I have before said, became feminine. And indeed that horrid Miss Grogram, who was, as it were, the princess of the ghouls, nearly monopolized the whole of it. Mamma Jones—we will call her Jones for the occasion—put in a word now and then, as did also the elder and more energetic Miss Macmanus. The dumpy lady with the broad back ate tea-cake incessantly; the two daughters looked scornful, as though they were above their company with reference to the five pupils; and the five pupils themselves sat in a row with the utmost propriety, each with her hands crossed on her lap before her.

Of what they were talking at last I became utterly oblivious. They had ignored me, going into realms of muslin, questions of maid-servants, female rights, and cheap under-clothing; and I therefore had ignored them. My mind had gone back to Mr. Horne and his garments. While they spoke of their rights, I was thinking of his wrongs; when they mentioned the price of flannel I thought of that of broadcloth.

But of a sudden my attention was arrested. Miss Macmanus had said something of the black silks of Antwerp, when Miss Grogram replied that she had just returned from that city and had there enjoyed a great success. My cousin had again asked something about the black silks, thinking, no doubt, that Miss Grogram had achieved some bargain; but that lady had soon undeceived her.

"Oh no," said Miss Grogram, "it was at the castle. We got such beautiful relics of General Chassé! Didn't we, Mrs. Jones?"

"Indeed we did," said Mrs. Jones, bringing out from beneath the skirts of her dress and ostensibly displaying a large black bag.

"And I've got such a beautiful needle-case," said the broad-back, displaying her prize. "I've been making it up all the morning." And she handed over the article to Miss Macmanus.

"And only look at this duck of a pen-wiper," simpered

flaxen-hair No. 2. "Only think of wiping one's pens with relics of General Chassé!" and she handed it over to the other Miss Macmanus.

"And mine's a pin-cushion," said No. 1, exhibiting the trophy.

"But that's nothing to what I've got," said Miss Grogram. "In the first place, there's a pair of slippers—a beautiful pair—they're not made up yet, of course; and then——"

The two Misses Macmanus and their five pupils were sitting open-eared, open-eyed, and open-mouthed. How all these sombre-looking articles could be relics of General Chassé did not at first appear clear to them.

"What are they, Miss Grogram?" said the elder Miss Macmanus, holding the needle-case in one hand and Mrs. Jones's bag in the other. Miss Macmanus was a strong-minded female, and I revered my cousin when I saw the decided way in which she intended to put down the greedy arrogance of Miss Grogram.

"They are relics."

"But where do they come from, Miss Grogram?"

"Why, from the castle, to be sure; from General Chassé's own rooms."

"Did anybody sell them to you?"

"No."

"Or give them to you?"

"Why, no; at least not exactly give."

"There they were, and she took 'em," said the broad-back.

Oh, what a look Miss Grogram gave her! "Took them! Of course I took them! That is, you took them as much as I did. They were things that we found lying about."

"What things?" asked Miss Macmanus, in a peculiarly strong-minded tone.

Miss Grogram seemed to be for a moment silenced. I had been ignored, as I have said, and my existence forgotten; but now I observed that the eyes of the culprits were turned towards me—the eyes, that is, of four of them. Mrs. Jones looked at me from beneath her fan; the two girls glanced at me furtively, and then their eyes fell to the lowest flounces of their frocks. Miss Grogram turned her spectacles right upon me, and I fancied that she nodded her head at me as a sort of answer to Miss Macmanus. The five pupils opened their mouths and

eyes wider ; but she of the broad back was nothing abashed. It would have been nothing to her had there been a dozen gentlemen in the room. "We just found a pair of black ——." The whole truth was told in the plainest possible language.

"Oh, Aunt Sally !" "Aunt Sally, how can you ?" "Hold your tongue, Aunt Sally !"

"And then Miss Grogram just cut them up with her scissors," continued Aunt Sally, not a whit abashed, "and gave us each a bit, only she took more than half for herself." It was clear to me that there had been some quarrel, some delicious quarrel, between Aunt Sally and Miss Grogram. Through the whole adventure I had rather respected Aunt Sally. "She took more than half for herself," continued Aunt Sally. "She kept all the——"

"Jemima," said the elder Miss Macmanus, interrupting the speaker and addressing her sister, "it is time, I think, for the young ladies to retire. Will you be kind enough to see them to their rooms ?" The five pupils thereupon rose from their seats and courtesied. They then left the room in file, the younger Miss Macmanus showing them the way.

"But we haven't done any harm, have we ?" asked Mrs. Jones, with some tremulousness in her voice.

"Well, I don't know," said Miss Macmanus. "What I'm thinking of now is this : to whom, I wonder, did the garments properly belong ? Who had been the owner and wearer of them ?"

"Why, General Chassé, of course," said Miss Grogram.

"They were the general's," repeated the two young ladies ; blushing, however, as they alluded to the subject.

"Well, we thought they were the general's, certainly ; and a very excellent article they were," said Mrs. Jones.

"Perhaps they were the butler's ?" said Aunt Sally. I certainly had not given her credit for so much sarcasm.

"Butler's !" exclaimed Miss Grogram, with a toss of her head.

"Oh ! Aunt Sally, Aunt Sally ! How can you ?" shrieked the two young ladies.

"Oh, laws !" ejaculated Mrs. Jones.

"I don't think that they could have belonged to the butler," said Miss Macmanus, with much authority, "seeing that domestics in this country are never clad in garments of that description ; so far my own observation enables me to

speaking with certainty. But it is equally sure that they were never the property of the general lately in command in Antwerp. Generals, when they are in full dress, wear ornamental lace upon their—their regimentals; and when . . .” So much she said, and something more, which it may be unnecessary that I should repeat; but such were her eloquence and logic that no doubt would have been left on the mind of any impartial hearer. If an argumentative speaker ever proved anything, Miss Macmanus proved that General Chassé had never been the wearer of the article in question.

“But I know very well they were his!” said Miss Grogam, who was not an impartial hearer. “Of course they were; whose else’s should they be?”

“I’m sure I hope they were his,” said one of the young ladies, almost crying.

“I wish I’d never taken it,” said the other.

“Dear, dear, dear!” said Mrs. Jones.

“I’ll give you my needle-case, Miss Grogam,” said Aunt Sally.

I had sat hitherto silent during the whole scene, meditating how best I might confound the red-nosed harpy. Now, I thought, was the time for me to strike in.

“I really think, ladies, that there has been some mistake,” said I.

“There has been no mistake at all, sir!” said Miss Grogam.

“Perhaps not,” I answered, very mildly; “very likely not. But some affair of a similar nature was very much talked about in Antwerp yesterday.”

“Oh, laws!” again ejaculated Mrs. Jones.

“The affair I allude to has been talked about a good deal, certainly,” I continued. “But perhaps it may be altogether a different circumstance.”

“And what may be the circumstance to which you allude?” asked Miss Macmanus, in the same authoritative tone.

“I dare say it has nothing to do with these ladies,” said I; “but an article of dress, of the nature they have described, was cut up in the castle of Antwerp on the day before yesterday. It belonged to a gentleman who was visiting the place; and I was given to understand that he is determined to punish the people who have wronged him.”

“It can’t be the same,” said Miss Grogam; but I could see that she was trembling.

"Oh, laws ! What will become of us ?" said Mrs. Jones.

"You can all prove that I didn't touch them, and that I warned her not," said Aunt Sally. In the meantime the two young ladies had almost fainted behind their fans.

"But how had it come to pass," asked Miss Macmanus, "that the gentleman had——"

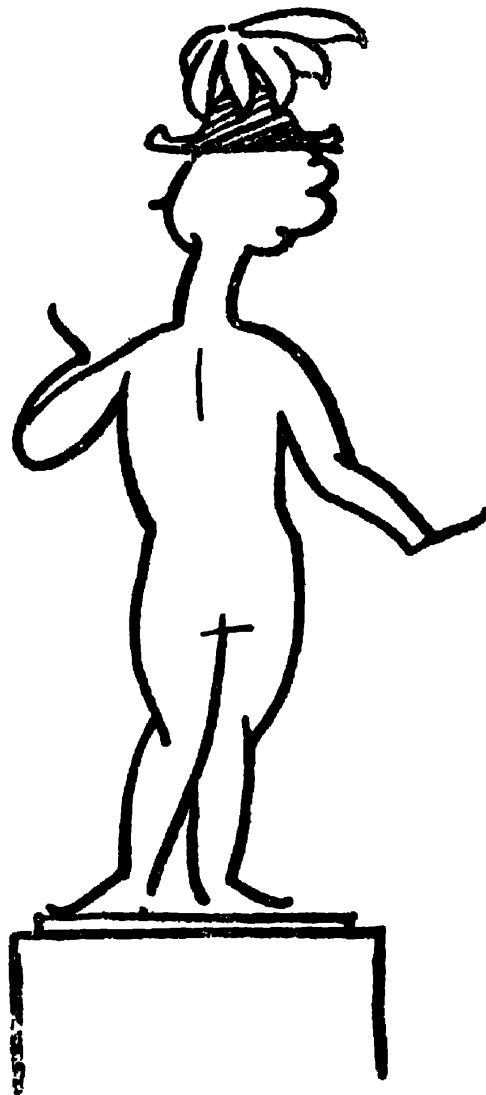
"I know nothing more about it, cousin," said I ; "only it does seem that there is an odd coincidence."

Immediately after this I took my leave. I saw that I had avenged my friend, and spread dismay in the hearts of those who had injured him. I had learned in the course of the evening at what hotel the five ladies were staying ; and in the course of the next morning I sauntered into the hall, and finding one of the porters alone, asked if they were still there. The man told me that they had started by the earliest diligence. "And," said he, "if you are a friend of theirs, perhaps you will take charge of these things, which they have left behind them?" So saying, he pointed to a table at the back of the hall, on which were lying the black bag, the black needle-case, the black pin-cushion, and the black pen-wiper. There was also a heap of fragments of cloth which I well knew had been intended by Miss Grogram for the comfort of her feet and ankles.

I declined the commission, however. "They were no special friends of mine," I said ; and I left all the relics still lying on the little table in the back hall.

"Upon the whole, I am satisfied !" said the Rev. Augustus Horne, when I told him the finale of the story.

THE STATUE
OF THE COMMANDER



ST. JOHN LUCAS

ST. JOHN LUCAS is a barrister by profession, but his chief interests have always been literary. During the war he was attached to the staff of the British Military Mission to Italy, a country which he knows well and which has provided the setting for several of his stories.

THE STATUE OF THE COMMANDER

I

THE pleasant hamlet of Chelsea, which lies south-west of the city London, has given shelter to many whose names are famous in art and politics ; but we may doubt that any of its most renowned inhabitants possessed the inestimable virtue, winning address, and consummate personal charm of Mr. William Binns, the son of John Binns, the son of Esdras, the son of Augustus Algernon, who took to sherry-cobbler, and came down in the world from genteel heights.

Concerning the family history of this prince of men and incomparable personage little is known. Probably, as in the case of other ancient lines, there was more family than history. It is generally believed, however, that the primeval and patriarchal Augustus Algernon was of aristocratic birth ; Mr. Binns, in moments of convivial expansiveness, would allude to him as the intimate friend of good King Billy, but the identity of this monarch is uncertain. At any rate, it is a fact that Augustus, shortly before he took to sherry-cobbler, married beneath him, lost all his money, property, and reputation at the card-tables of his royal or noble friends, and thenceforward led an undistinguished life in Chelsea until gin completed that which sherry-cobbler had begun. He assumed the name of Binns from motives of secrecy rather than of shame, and his relatives never gave themselves the pleasure of coming to call on him.

His son Esdras (he was born after his father's death, and the name was chosen by his mother, a devout and melancholy woman) was quite unremarkable, and followed the monotonous profession of a dealer in scrap-iron. To him was born a male child, John, who developed into a man of spirit, amorous, pugilistic, and great-thewed. John Binns very soon exhibited a strong distaste for the scrap-iron trade, and was in a fair way

to becoming a prodigal and wastrel, when a chance meeting with a certain strangely garbed, long-haired gentleman with dreamy eyes averted this fate and decided the destiny of his descendants. Art had come to abide in Chelsea, and the long-haired gentleman, who was one of her chief votaries, needed a model. John Binns had the figure of a Greek athlete, and a bargain was soon struck. But the painter realized very soon that the irregular existence of a model would be fatal to a young man whose gallant and bibulous tendencies were already precociously developed, and after long argument he persuaded him to become apprenticed to a maker of picture-frames, and to pose only on Sundays and in the evenings. John Binns became a respectable member of society, and when he had grown too obese to be of any further use as a model he found himself in possession of a flourishing business which eventually descended to his son William, the famous, the incomparable, the hero of this strange brief history.

Mr. Binns in no way resembled a Greek athlete. He was short and stout, and when he had reached the mellow age of fifty he had a remarkable likeness to the picture of the spectacled old sheep who sits at a counter in a tiny shop in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*. His head (except its summit, which was brilliantly bald) was covered with short, very curly white fleece; this fleece decorated also his cheeks and throat, and when he emerged into the world from his workshop it was frequently adorned with tiny particles of gold leaf, so that he had the aspect of a woolly victim that had been gilded for the sacrifice. His face was very large and round and benevolent, and his eyes shone with a bright and infantine candour through the spectacles that were always slipping down his short, blunt nose. He had a wonderful air of bland, pink innocence, and his loquacity was amazing. He had theories on everything under the sun, and uttered his opinions with an eager artlessness that was quite irresistible.

Yet it must not be supposed that this prodigy of nature and prince of picture-framers was a mere butterfly of comic opera who flitted from studio to studio in quest of the honey of appreciative laughter. His popularity did not interfere with his attention to business; he worked heartily, and a great part of his leisure was consecrated to a high and serious pursuit. He had a passion for reading poetry and history; a real passion, though, perhaps, his study of the first was slightly

influenced by his pride in being able to produce an apt quotation at any moment—a gift that did not desert him even in moments of grave personal danger. Who does not remember the famous occasion when three insane bullocks ravened up and down the Embankment on a Sunday morning, causing all the promenaders on that pleasant shore to fly helter-skelter to their homes or Battersea Park? Mr. Binns was there, but he did not fly. Instead, he struck a superb attitude, glanced up and down the deserted street, and murmured :

“This little town
Is hemptied of its folk this pious morn,”

displaying a coolness which so greatly impressed the besotted kine that they passed by him and devoted all their energies to pursuing a lady bicyclist in bloomers. With regard to history, he was a decided specialist. He had read Gibbon and could quote him copiously, but his real interest lay in ancient Greece; he had maps of that divine land all over his parlour, and Pericles was his hero of heroes. (He called him Perikels.) He was an expert on mythology; Homer, whom he read in Mr. Lang's remarkable translation, pleased him more than all the mighty mouthings of Miss Corelli or Mr. Caine; and the exploits of the Gods of Olympus afforded, as he said, subjects of conversation for every kind of society in which he happened to find himself. He read a paper on the battle of Salamis (*Salamis pro hac vice*) at the “Bargeman's Friend”, and had made and gilded a large model trireme which always turned turtle two minutes after it was launched in the Round Pond. He was almost a pagan in soul though he went to church every Sunday. When his brother was married he composed an ode to Aphrodite (rhyming with night) which so deeply scandalized the bride's mother and aunts that they left the room during the course of its recital.

This was the master-passion of his existence. For the rest he was an excellent husband and father, very fond of children, and always ready to help honest men who had fallen behind in the struggle for life. He possessed plenty of shrewd worldly wisdom, as certain rogues who thought him a fool because he quoted poetry and exhorted them to read 'Omer discovered to their cost. He had two weaknesses; the first was a love of port—a taste inherited, perhaps, from the

primeval Augustus—and the second was an excessive pride in his family. But the first was a public vice—Mr. Binns was no lonely drinker—and the second was a secret failing which manifested itself mainly in the contemplation of a large family tree when his wife and children were in bed. Who cares if there are two threadbare patches on the shining robe of genius? Mr. Binns was admired in all the studios, and in return he watched the careers of his various employers with benevolence and pride. All kinds of pleasant legends were current concerning him; it was even hinted that he had saved several struggling geniuses from starvation or the river. At any rate, it is a fact that the great Whistler pronounced him to be "*fondément bon*".

Now concerning the interest in sculpture manifested by this very noble personage, and of his consequent discovery of his famous relative, and of the wife of the latter, and of his humiliation, and his wrath, and the affair of the port, and the conspicuous vengeance that he devised and executed, this is the only true chronicle.

II

There came to Chelsea, in the spring of the year 1905, a young man named Geoffrey Cave. He was a sculptor by trade, and no bungler in that difficult *métier*; for five years he had worked in Paris, and after a long spell of the gregarious poverty which is quite amusing when youth is flying towards attainment with the pair of wings that are called health and hope, he achieved considerable fame, and held an exhibition on his own account which resulted in the sale of nearly all his work. His renown reached London; he sent several statues to the International Society's exhibitions, and received many letters from friends urging him to return to England. It had always been his intention to do this, and now that he had emerged from obscurity the appropriate moment seemed to have arrived. He hired a studio in Chelsea, and the Boulevard St. Michel knew him no more.

As he was not a painter he had no need of picture-frames; and did not employ the great Binns. But the fame of this paragon soon reached him—there was no escape from it between the King's Road and the river!—and at length he

met the phenomenon himself in the studio of a painter friend. This painter had executed a work of art which depicted a youthful priestess in Greek dress feeding pigeons under an Ionic portico. Mr. Binns, who had brought a frame for the picture, stood before the latter for several minutes in mute contemplation. Occasionally he made a kind of natural telescope of his hands and applied it to his left eye.

"Now, there's a *pretty* subject!" he said at last, purring over the adjective. "There's what I call a really *pretty* subject. Give me Greece, say I, 'Ellas, as they call it in the books, and you may keep your modern fine ladies and knights in armour and gents in silk 'ats for them that likes 'em. Ho yes, *there's* subjects! You might paint away all your life at things in 'Omer and never get more than a tenth of the way through. Beautiful old stories! But who cares for 'em now? Mr. Price gave me a pass for the New English the other day, and I couldn't find anything but skeleton ladies with 'ats the size of an 'ansom-cab wheel and green fogs and the church of Montrooce-sor-mair—I know the name, for I saw it forty-two times in the catalogue. I went to the British Museum afterwards and did a rest-cure amongst the Parthenon figures.

"Next day, I think it was, I took a frame to Mr. Sargent's in Tite Street, and there he was, painting away at a great, gaunt lady with a smile like a hungry tiger, and I says to him, 'With your talent, sir, begging your pardon, I wonder why you don't paint one of those Greek gods or goddesses; Venus or Aphrodight or Zeeus with his thunderbolt, or Cupid and Sick.*' But he turned on me as fierce as you please, and he says, 'If you want that kind of thing, Binns, you take a bus,' he says, 'tō Grove End Road, St. John's Wood, N.W.' I didn't say any more, but I went off feeling bad. A great man like that, and throwing away his chances, all to paint sour-looking dukes and duchesses and 'Ebrews in opera 'ats. I tell you one thing about your picture, sir, you might write *Salve* on the doorstep of the Temple. It was usual in Greece. It means, I understand, 'Ail."

"I was always told that it meant 'Please wipe your boots'," said the painter.

"Sandals, sir, sandals," Mr. Binns corrected him gently, with a scholarly shudder.

* Psyche?

"Do you know the Greek things in the museum very well?" asked Geoffrey Cave. Mr. Binns turned towards him and spoke with emotion.

"Considerably, sir," he said; "but no one can know them *very* well, for they're a mystery; they're different every time; they're like strange, beautiful ghosts come back from some lovely world. Sometimes they make me almost frightened, and sometimes—I ain't what you'd call a religious man, sir, but they make me want to pray. That Demeter of Something especially, sir: the great calm goddess in the little alcove-place all by herself. They sit there all day listening to the buzz of the motors outside, and watching the school-girls, and the giggling idiots who come because they think things with no clothes on are funny, and the poor devils who sneak in to get out of the rain, and the learned gents who stare at them with spectacles, but no one knows what's going on inside their 'earts; they know some secret that they'll never tell—it's of that they think. Lord love you, they don't notice us! They look through us as if we was glass. But my tongue's given me the slip as usual, sir. I beg your pardon. Do you 'appen to take an interest in them yourself?"

"I'm a sculptor," said the young man. "And I believe," he added, regarding Mr. Binns very gravely—"I believe that you're a poet."

"Oh, bless my soul, nothing of the sort, sir!" cried Mr. Binns, looking intensely pleased, however. "It's true that on a certain occasion, my poor brother's marriage—he came to grief soon afterwards—I turned off a little thing: an ode to the great Goddess of Love. But it was not well received. May I ask if you sculpture antiques, sir?"

"Not often," Cave answered, "but I have done a—*a* Venus. You can come to see it if you care about that kind of thing." He gave Mr. Binns the address of his studio.

"It will be a great pleasure," said Mr. Binns. "Allow me to say, sir, that you are on the right lines. One can't say it of most people in Chelsea. Good day, sir. Twenty-eight by twelve, you said, I think. *Good* afternoon, gentlemen."

He came to Geoffrey Cave's studio and gazed with enthusiasm on his works, though he displayed obviously

more interest in their subject than in their treatment. Over the Aphrodite, which was of heroic size, he became ecstatic; and it was certainly a noble work of art, though far too large to be seen to advantage in so limited a space. He was very indignant when he heard that the statue had been refused by every exhibition to which its creator had sent it.

"It's a shame, sir, a *shame*," said Mr. Binns in a thrilling voice. "If it wasn't that it was new you might set it in that big room at the museum along of the Phidases and Eljin Marbles. I ain't flattering you, sir; it's as fine a thing as I ever saw. Have you sent it to the International Society?"

"They said they couldn't afford to take the Albert Hall for their show," said Cave. "I'm sick of the thing; no one'll buy it and no society will show it, and it can't be seen here. I've a good mind to give it to you if you'll promise to set it up on the tomb of your deceased maiden aunt. Even in a cemetery it would have some chance of being seen."

Mr. Binns made consolatory gestures. "Don't you be down-hearted, sir," he said impressively. "Mark my words, the day will come. Nowadays people think they've banished these old gods and goddesses, but they keep on coming back, and Venus in especial. She was the child of Zeeus to start with, and she'll live longer than any of her brothers and sisters. No cemeteries for her! But I should like to see the faces of my family if she was put where you said, sir. She's immortal all right, and she won't let us forget it."

"A poet said something the same," murmured Geoffrey.

"Ah, Mr. Swinburne!" said Mr. Binns. "I knew 'im." He became reminiscent. But at intervals he returned to gaze at the great Aphrodite. "Ma'am," he said at last, addressing it, "you're a marvel! Don't you be afraid that you're going to stay for ever in a studio. You shall be set in some wide place, and the little men shall go up and down, up and down past you, all day long. They may not turn their silly heads to look at you, but they'll feel that you're there. *That's* what I want!" he added, turning abruptly to Cave. "I want all those poor prisoners, as you might say, in the museum to be let out and put in the sun, to stand on great cliffs over the sea, to sit in the market-places of towns where everyone could see 'em without their labels and away from the fog and the bad air. Sir," he concluded with a majestic sweep of his arm, "the moral effect on the nation would be tremendous!" He

strode in front of the goddess, pointed towards her with one hand, and to himself with the other.

"We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,
Thou art noble and nude and hantique,"

he declaimed.

Cave nearly collapsed when he tried to imagine Mr. Binns in the act of shifting, bedecking, and bedraping, but he realized the sincerity that prompted the man's somewhat grotesque enthusiasm, and conquered his impulse towards laughter.

"It's a gem, sir, a gem," concluded Mr. Binns, "and its setting should be 'Yde Park."

That night, in the bosom of his family and in twentieth-century Chelsea, Mr. Binns (in shirt-sleeves, with gold leaf in his hair) solemnly drank the health of Cytherean Aphrodite. We regret to have to record the fact that Mrs. Binns, a stout lady with very placid eyes, raised no kind of objection to this pagan orgy.

"Binns always was cracked about them 'eathen goddesses," she remarked cheerfully to Mr. Jenks, the assistant, who was engaged to her youngest daughter Luna.

"There now!" exclaimed Mr. Jenks, idiotically and with equal cheerfulness.

"You were one yourself once, old lady," said Mr. Binns, beaming at her, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. "And your name was Demeter—Demeter or Sybeel."

"Oh, get on with yer!" responded Mrs. Binns. And Mr. Binns poured a libation to the Berecynthian.

III

He soon became a regular visitor to Geoffrey Cave's studio, for the sculptor needed someone to pack up work which he happened to be sending away, and Mr. Binns had long practised this function. The more Geoffrey saw of the man the more he was amused by him. Mr. Binns was not invariably loquacious; he could be quite silent when Geoffrey was at work, and he contrived to be paternal without being in the least offensive. On one occasion Geoffrey forgot to tell him to pack up a small relief which was due to be sent off on that particular evening, and had taken it to Mr. Binns' abode. There he was introduced to the reincarnation of Demeter and

initiated into the mysteries of the family tree, over which Mr. Binns happened just then to be poring. The heir of all the ages held forth at some length on his ancient lineage, but displayed a decent modesty.

"Of course it's very pleasant," he said. "Very pleasant to know that you've got twenty generations at the back of you, but many a rank waster has more, and though I've as many ancestors as anyone could want, lord, they were most of them rotters. Sometimes I feel as if I'd swap the lot of them for three hundred a year in consols, but I suppose if the chance came I wouldn't. Still, twenty generations and not one famous name isn't much to be proud of. There's one of the family now who's rather celebrated, but he's only a collateral. We're direct line."

"Don't you believe him, sir," said Mrs. Binns. "He's as proud as proud of his pedigree. But he never told me about it for years. My father was a chimney-sweep in the Borough, they say."

"A fine, active profession," said Mr. Binns; "not exactly intellection, but beneficent, when you come to think of it. My father was an artist's model and founded my business; his great-grandfather was an earl, and I know which of the two was the better man. Not that I'm against earls; I'm all for the picturesque and against dead levels and socialism and every public-house loafer as good as yourself and thinking himself better when he's sober and a king when he's drunk. But what says the poet? 'The rank is but the guinea's stamp.' You've read the poem, I expect, sir. By Burns, the divine ploughman."

Mr. Binns rolled up his pedigree. "Old stuff," he said, jerking a thumb towards it. "Makes you feel as if you'd been prowling about family vaults. But a consolation at times—a consolation. May I take the liberty of asking if you belong to the Caves of Cave Castle, sir?"

"Not that I know of," Geoffrey answered.

"Ah!" said Mr. Binns. He was silent for a moment. "They call cousin with Us," he remarked.

IV

Now the coming of the Commander was in this wise: The males of Geoffrey Cave's family had been soldiers for

many generations, and he himself had created a great scandal by refusing to follow the profession of arms. He bore the annoyance of his relatives with equanimity, though he was fully aware that they regarded him as lapsed and lost, and spoke of him as "poor Geoffrey" during his sojourn in Paris. When he had reached a certain celebrity, however, their attitude was modified, and one of them even managed to obtain him the commission for a regimental war memorial. But they persisted in thinking that a sculptor was only a glorified kind of stone-mason, and they visited him seldom—a sin of omission for which Geoffrey was truly thankful.

One morning late in April he was sitting on an inverted wine-case in his studio, smoking a pipe and contemplating the result of three hours' hard labour on a small statue of a boy. He wore a very old blue French blouse, and his face was agreeably decorated with patches of modelling clay. He was satisfied on the whole with his work, and at intervals, without removing his pipe, he broke into short outbursts of song.

The loudest of these was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a series of heavy blows on his door. He looked out, and discovered two figures standing in the bright spring sunshine: the first belonged to a man, and was short and fat, but unmistakably military; the second was that of a woman, very well dressed, and of decidedly acidulated aspect.

The fat man stared at Geoffrey as if he were a ghost from the grave, and certainly, if you were unaccustomed to frequenting the studios of sculptors, Geoffrey's appearance was astounding.

"I wish to see Mr. Cave," said the fat man. He spoke as if he were giving the order to fire a volley. The lady looked at Geoffrey with disapproval.

"I am Mr. Cave," said Geoffrey. "Won't you come in?"

The fat man stared at him fiercely for a moment, and the lady uttered a brief exclamation of surprise.

"The son of Colonel Cave?" she demanded. And when Geoffrey had answered in the affirmative, she said, "Really!" and then closed her lips to a thin line. Geoffrey realized at once that she was a friend of his family.

They entered the studio, and he apologized for the general disorder. The fat man instantly assumed that the apology was for his personal appearance, and accepted it patronizingly.

This annoyed Geoffrey. "Confound them, do they think I ought to work in a frock-coat and patent-leather boots?" he growled internally. The fat man ceased his astonished inspection of the studio and turned to him: "I don't think there is any necessity for me to introduce myself," he said.

"No?" said Geoffrey vaguely, wondering why on earth there wasn't. The lady came forward. She spoke in a high staccato voice. Her nose was excessively aquiline.

"There appears to be," she said icily. "My husband is General Sir John Barrington Bing." The words issued from her lips in strong crescendo, and Geoffrey felt as if he had received them full in the face. But he knew his man now. The General was one of several whose reputations had been made at the War Office and lost during the last important war. He had been recalled from the field of action, and a certain daily paper had greatly increased in circulation by fomenting a hubbub about the justice or injustice of this disgrace. He apologized for not recognizing the famous man, excusing himself by asserting that he had never seen any portraits of him in mufti.

"Everyone recognizes him in the streets," said Lady Bing.

"Everyone," echoed the General. "It's a perfect nuisance."

There was a pause, and he stared at Geoffrey's various works of art.

"You don't seem to be doing quite the sort of thing I thought of," he said at last. "Do you ever make portraits of people—in stone and marble and that kind of thing, I mean? Public statues. Eh?"

"I've done a good many," Geoffrey answered, "though I haven't got any in the studio at present. Do you want one of Lady Bing?"

He caught the lady's eye, and found that she was glaring at him. "No, indeed!" she said. "Then I must conclude," she went on, "that you haven't even heard of the resolution passed by the people at Market Clayford."

Geoffrey smiled deprecatingly and shook his head.

"It is my husband's home," said Lady Bing; "the family has been there since fourteen-fifty."

"Really!" murmured Geoffrey, unconsciously mimicking her accent, and staring at the General's chin. He decided that it resembled a sea-lion's. "Intermarriages, I suppose," he said to himself.

"Since you come of a family that has always been in the Service, Mr. Cave," said Lady Bing, "you can't be ignorant of what has happened—of the cruel injustice that has been done to my poor husband. Intrigues have been hatched against him; old friends have turned from him; but I am thankful and proud to say that his own people have remained staunch."

"Very proper of them," said Geoffrey vaguely. He had an idea that her remarks were taken from some speech that she had made in Market Clayford.

"The Mayor and Corporation," she went on, "after consulting privately with the people, have decided to commemorate my husband's career with a memorial, which is to be erected in the market-place. They wrote to the General and told him that this was their resolution, and that he was to choose the sculptor and the kind of memorial that he preferred. The Mayor suggested a drinking-fountain, with a medallion of my husband on one side and one of himself on the other, but for various reasons we consider this unsatisfactory. After much consideration we have decided on an equestrian statue."

"Was the General in the cavalry?" asked the foolish Geoffrey.

The General snorted, and Lady Bing looked at the young artist with obvious contempt.

"General officers do not usually go on foot," she said.

"It seems as well, after all, that you didn't join the Service, sir," said the former. "But let us talk business. Colonel Cave told us that you were becoming quite a sculptor. Will you have a shot at this statue? Of course, if we don't like it, or the Mayor and Corporation don't like it, we can't take it."

Geoffrey almost lost his temper. "I'll make a model first," he said; "but of course when once the thing is finished it would be rather a nuisance to me if it sat always in the studio. I've one thing that does that already." And he pointed to the Aphrodite.

"Oh, at any rate it will be a good advertisement of your work," said Lady Bing. "Better than that!"

When Mr. Binns came into the studio an hour later he found Geoffrey chewing an empty pipe and in a state of intense depression.

"Binns," said the young sculptor, "I've been an ass."

"I beg *your* pardon, sir," said Mr. Binns, contradicting gently. "But may I ask what's the matter?"

"I've promised to do an equestrian statue," explained Geoffrey, "a statue of a General, a fat man and an evil, a bad type with a liquorish eye and a chin like a sea-lion's. He has a wife, Binns, oh, a wife! She's a combination of a Government official and the Day of Judgment. And I feel like a huckster, and I wish I were dead," he concluded.

"A General," said Mr. Binns, musing. "Now that's bad. Generals are necessary, no doubt of it, but they ain't as a rule picturesque. Portly men, sir. All right, of course, but not graceful, not Greek. No fluency; no soft curves. I'm sorry you took it on, sir—I am indeed. What might be the General's name?"

"His name you have heard," said Geoffrey. "It is Sir John Barrington Bing. He made an awful ass of himself at Dirk's Drift. And I don't like the look of him. It'll be a failure."

Mr. Binns started melodramatically when Geoffrey pronounced the General's name. "Sir John Barrington Bing!" he echoed.

"Yes. What's the matter? Do you know him?" asked Geoffrey.

Mr. Binns was silent for a moment.

"No, sir, no," he said at length. "That is, only by reputation. But I've seen his pictures in the papers." He gazed thoughtfully at the Aphrodite, then shook his head.

"He'll be a bad subject, a bad subject," he said. "No line. No contour. Eh, what a pity!" And he relapsed into thoughtful silence.

V

After great argument it was decided that the memorial, instead of being a statue of the General in full uniform seated on his charger, should display him, in the less gorgeous trappings which he had worn on active service, standing on a rock and shading his eyes with one hand as he stared across the veldt. Geoffrey made a journey to Market Clayford for the purpose of inspecting the future site of his work, and met the

Mayor of that city, a wonderful and horrible personage with whiskers, who patronized him most offensively.

The General came to the studio nearly every day. He improved on acquaintance. His wife did not improve; she often came with him, and on each occasion when she did so Geoffrey had great difficulty in keeping his temper. She carped at every new detail in the large clay model on which the sculptor was working, lamented the slowness of his method—she had expected, apparently, that the marble effigy would be finished in a fortnight!—and reviled the unfortunate General because he so soon grew tired of standing. Sometimes, however, the warrior came alone, and after he had posed for half an hour would drink a couple of whiskies-and-sodas and wax communicative. He never spoke of the campaign which had ended his career, but cursed the War Office with blasphemous fluency. Wine, women, and the War Office, indeed, seemed to be the only subjects on which he would willingly converse, but after a while Geoffrey discovered that he was immensely proud of his family, which was extremely ancient, and of the old castle which it had inhabited for nearly five hundred years.

The sculptor decided that he was pompous, self-indulgent, and stupid; but he was good-natured, in a torpid kind of way, and he probably possessed a great amount of rather pig-headed personal courage. Geoffrey did his best to express the latter quality in his model, but though he tried persistently to tone down the vanity and greed that were so plainly written in the General's features, those unfortunate defects kept on asserting themselves beneath his fingers while he worked. He had an uneasy sense that the figure's attitude was not that of a commander who scans the horizon for the advancing foe, but that of an esurient old gourmand on the look-out for a belated provision wagon. As the work went on, his dissatisfaction increased. He invited Mr. Binns to criticize the work, and Mr. Binns was not consoling.

"Of course it's *clever*," said Mr. Binns, after long contemplation—"it's clever and real. But it don't uplift me; it ain't ideal. It's a pity you did it, sir, if you'll excuse me, for it's off the right lines. Even you can't do anything with a subject like that, except make a portrait." He sighed mournfully.

"Of course the General isn't beautiful or noble to look

upon," said Geoffrey. "But there's something in him that I tried to express. It's authority; it's conviction—probably wrong; it's courage, of a kind. But I don't seem to have got it."

"No, sir," said Mr. Binns. "You ain't got it. He looks to me very like a man who sells sausages at that little shop in the World's End. It's a great pity."

"Oh, well," said Geoffrey. "Perhaps it'll look all right in marble. I told you they were going to stick it up in a market-place for all the world to admire, Binns?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Binns without enthusiasm. He turned from the offending clay and gazed at the Aphrodite. "Ah, if you were only going to be set up in a market-place, my beauty!" he murmured. "That would give them something to look at; and it'd make you famous all over the world, sir," he added, turning to Geoffrey.

"Oh, there's no doubt of that!" Geoffrey answered, laughing.

Lady Bing was no more enthusiastic than Mr. Binns. "It's like him in a way," she said, holding her nose high and surveying the finished model through her pince-nez, "but it misses all his distinction, his aristocracy." Geoffrey hated her, yet he felt that she was right, though she used the wrong words to express her sensations.

The General, however, thought the statue "wasn't half bad". "He's toned down my complexion, anyhow," he said. The Mayor of Market Clayford, too, who paid a visit to the studio, was of the opinion that, though the model didn't impress him at all, the marble statue would look well in front of the Jubilee Clock Tower. The detail of a work of art, according to the Mayor, didn't matter much; it was the setting that was important. Clayford market-place was an historic spot.

It was with mixed feelings that Geoffrey got to work on his block of marble.

VI

A month later, in spite of the depression of Geoffrey, the criticisms of Lady Bing, and the disapproval of Mr. Binns, the statue of the Commander was almost finished. It was

arranged that Sir John Barrington Bing was to give Geoffrey two more sittings, and that as soon as the figure was completed it was to be sent at once to Market Clayford.

Now it befell that on the day of the first of these sittings, Geoffrey travelled by a train on the underground, which stuck fast for a quarter of an hour and made him late for his appointment. When he reached the studio he found the General and Lady Bing waiting for him. He noticed that they both seemed strangely morose; the General had all the air of being about to preside over a court-martial, and Lady Bing was pacing to and fro with a most formidable scowl brooding like a thunderstorm over the precipitous ridge of her nose. Geoffrey supposed that they were annoyed at being kept waiting. He thought the annoyance rather absurd, but he apologized and explained the reason of the delay. They did not seem to hear him. Lady Bing went to the General and said something to him in a low voice, and the General said, "Better tell him now, my dear, then he can finish it off today." There was a pause, and then Lady Bing strode towards Geoffrey.

"Mr. Cave," she said, "I am obliged to tell you that this is the last occasion on which my husband will be able to come to your studio." Her lips tightened convulsively; she seemed to be on the verge of a nervous crisis. Geoffrey looked at her with some astonishment.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he answered. "But I don't think there is any necessity for another day, really. I can pull through, General, if you don't mind staying a little longer than usual. Are you going out of London?"

"No, sir, we are not!" said the General, puffing like a traction-engine. "The fact is," he continued, between the puffs, "my wife considers that we have been insulted—insulted in your studio. She won't hear of me coming near the place again. Personally, I think she rather overrates the affair. However, if you can finish me off today it will be convenient."

Geoffrey stared at them. "Insulted!" he cried. "What on earth is it? Have I done anything to annoy you? I assure you that I had absolutely no intention——"

Lady Bing silenced him with an uplifted hand.

"You have not insulted us, Mr. Cave," she said solemnly. "It happened before your arrival. When we came here this

morning we found a horrible, odious, little vulgar man in charge of the studio. He began to talk to us at once, before we had even said good morning to him, and in about two minutes he was trying to prove to the General that he was his cousin. A dreadful man without an *b* in any of his words, and with his face all over yellow paint! It's insufferable!"

A light broke across the darkness in Geoffrey's soul.

"It was Binns!" he cried. He saw the whole scene in a moment, and could not help laughing. "I'm very sorry," he said, "but really I don't think it need annoy you. Binns is a most awfully good little fellow, really, and clever, too, but he's mad on his family tree. His people came down in the world a few generations ago, but according to him they used to be tremendous gods. I'm quite certain that he honestly thought you were connected with them, and hadn't the least intention of annoying you."

"And I am quite certain that he *had*!" cried the lady. "He didn't mention his absurd idea until after I told him to stop talking and go away."

"Oh, you did that?" said Geoffrey thoughtfully.

"Yes, I did!" she answered. "His manner was insufferable. He actually patronized the General, and told him that the idea of putting up this statue was a mistake. So I told him to be off, and instead of going, he sat down—sat down!—and began to claim kinship with us—with the Bings of Clayford Castle!" She paused for breath.

"Oh, there's no harm in the fellow, I dare say!" said the General. "He's a bit above himself, that's all. It's the result of these damned Socialist agitators. Ruining the country. Want to see the poor rich and the rich poor," concluded the General, vaguely yet epigrammatically.

"I assure you that Binns is a most excellent fellow, and he is not a Socialist," said Geoffrey. "If you met him again he would certainly not allude to your relationship. I gather that you showed him that the allusion annoyed you."

Lady Bing uttered a sharp exclamation of anger.

"As if there could be any relationship!" she cried.

"Quite possible! Black sheep in every family," said the General, who appeared to be enjoying his wife's annoyance. "Think of your Uncle Edmund!"

She ignored him, biting her lip. "He's just the kind of man who would try to blackmail us into giving him money,"

she said. "I knew in a moment what his intentions were. The General didn't see through him ; he knows what I think of his powers of judging men." The General puffed again ; he had evidently passed an uncomfortable ten minutes between the departure of Mr. Binns and the arrival of Geoffrey.

"I think you overrate your own," said the sculptor. "Binns is the last man in the world to accept a favour of anyone. I'm ready now, if you are, General. Aren't you going to stay, Lady Bing ?" For the lady was making for the door.

"Certainly not !" she said, and she departed, furious. The General smiled feebly, but made no further comment on the scene. Geoffrey worked in silence. His soul was aching for Mr. Binns' version of the affair.

He heard it late that afternoon. "He may be famous and she may be her ladyship and all the rest of it," said Mr. Binns, shining with indignation and gold leaf, "but I tell you this, sir, they're snobs ! I'd hardly said a word when she ordered me out of the place as if it was her own and I was one of her servants. Then, of course, I lost my temper, though I kept externally smiling, and I sat down and told them that I was a near and dear relation. It's perfect truth. You remember my telling you that only one member of my family had been really celebrated ? It was the General as I alluded to, though I didn't think it right to mention him by name. I'm a Bing myself really of Bray Hill. The General belongs to a younger branch—fifteenth century. We came over with Norman Will, they say. Bing with an *i*, just as the General spells it. In my 'umble opinion he's disgraced the family by marrying that woman, and I wish I'd told him so."

Mr. Binns was evidently hurt. Geoffrey attempted to pour balm on his wounds.

"It ain't that I mind their being annoyed because of what I said about the family," continued Mr. Binns. "In a way that was natural, and I knew before I started that they would be and stirred them up on purpose. What I object to is their disgusting vulgarity and rudeness. You can't deny it, sir ; they've patronized you ; they'd have treated you as dirt beneath their boots just as they did me if you hadn't happened to be an artist that they were getting something out of. They're borjaw to the bottom of their 'earts. But there ! What's the use of talking ? The thing's over, and not worth thinking of, except that it makes one out of 'armony with

human nature. I dare say they've troubles of their own and are all on edge, as it were. Still," concluded Mr. Binns, wagging his head, "civility's civility. You can't get over that. It's the test of a gentleman. Lord! I should like to show 'em that pedigree!"

"They're a pair of idiots," said Geoffrey, "though the General is not so bad, really. You forget all about them, Binns."

"I may forgive but I never forget," said Mr. Binns sublimely. "I see the statue's nearly finished, sir. Ah, he's a poor type, a poor type. Fatty degeneration of the mind, I call it. But when you think of her you can't wonder."

He made no further allusion to the scene, and the General and his wife visited the studio no more. A few days later the statue was ready to go to Market Clayford, where a plinth already awaited it.

VII

It had been Geoffrey's intention to accompany the effigy of the General and to attend the ceremony of unveiling. But a day or two before the date of this function he received a letter from Paris which informed him that John Wilton was seriously ill. John Wilton was a painter, and Geoffrey's most intimate friend; in olden days they had shared a studio in the Quartier, pooled their scanty resources, and even, like heroes of Mürger, worn each other's clothes. After Geoffrey's departure Wilton had isolated himself from everyone and become a complete recluse. His former friends attributed this sudden hatred of the world to an unfortunate love-affair. For a time they tried to break through his seclusion, but he showed them, quite politely but unmistakably, that he preferred to be alone, and they desisted one by one from the attempt. Wilton was left to live, solitary and splendid, in his dilapidated old studio near the Jardin des Plantes.

The thought of Wilton lying ill and untended in that melancholy dwelling depressed Geoffrey's honest soul, and he resolved to go to Paris as soon as the memorial was unveiled. But when a telegram came which announced that Wilton was much worse and in grave danger, the statue of the

Commander suddenly dwindled to most microscopic importance, and Geoffrey made up his mind to leave for Paris without delay. Mr. Binns, he decided, should go as his deputy—even at the risk of another collision with Lady Bing—and should watch over the statue until it was safely on its pedestal. He sent for the great man and gave him instructions as to packing and transporting, all of which Mr. Binns promised to follow faithfully. Geoffrey packed a bag and caught the night train to Paris. When he arrived Wilton was out of danger, but Geoffrey found the sight of old familiar things very pleasant, and was also greatly relieved at the thought of escaping the foolish ceremony and all the congratulations on a work of art of which he felt no reason to be proud. He did not hurry back to England. He felt that he could rely absolutely on Mr. Binns. Mark the workings of Destiny, how she manipulates the pawns in her great game!

On the evening when the statue was to be sent off a domestic crisis occurred in the household of Mr. Binns. The young man Jenks, an amiable and too romantic youth, was observed by the fair Luna, his betrothed, to be paying conspicuous attention to some unknown damsel in the little garden that lies between Cheyne Walk and the river. The result of this vision was that when the unsuspecting Jenks returned to tea at the Binns' house he became the target for various fine examples of feminine invective. Mrs. Binns called him a regular young Don Juan, and Luna (in tears, with her hair most becomingly dishevelled) feverishly thrust buns into a bag and besought him to return with them to the Embankment, adding the cynical information that the bag contained ample provision for two persons. The volatile Jenks was for a time overwhelmed by this tornado of reproaches, but at length he became angry and began to retort. Mr. Binns entered the room in time to hear him assert that since they wanted him to go he'd go, and not come back till the 30th of February, for he knew now what their tongues were like, and as for all their everlasting jabber about their family and their ancestors that were dukes, he was fed up to the chin with it. Mr. Jenks then withdrew, but the majesty of his departure was marred by the fact that he forgot his hat and had to come back for it.

Mr. Binns was the only member of the family who did not attach any serious importance to the episode. "He'll come to his senses all right, my love," he said, patting the weeping Luna on her heaving back. But nevertheless the ultimate utterance of Jenks galled his soul, and the mournful faces of his family depressed him. He went out when he had finished his tea, and a few yards from his door he met Tomes the photographer, who had a red nose but was extremely cultured and a great student of History. Mr. Binns caught Mr. Tomes by the lapel of his coat.

"If I am not mistaken, George," said Mr. Binns, "today is the anniversary of the birthday of the great and never-to-be-forgotten poet 'Omer."

Mr. Tomes knew the formula, and replied with another.

"I had almost forgotten it, William," he said. "You have a wonderful memory for such matters."

Mr. Binns meditated for a moment, then spoke.

"Port, I think," he said.

"Amen," responded Mr. Tomes. And they retired from the feverish world to a bar parlour.

They did not emerge till eight o'clock, when they parted with extreme friendliness. Mr. Binns did not return home, but directed his steps to Geoffrey Cave's studio, where the statue of the Commander was awaiting its packing-case. He turned on the lights and sank into an armchair, folded his hands across his stomach, and contemplated the finished work of art. He stared at it in silence for several minutes, then he waved one of his hands in the air and murmured, "Borjaw, borjaw." After this he shifted the armchair so that he could see the Aphrodite.

In the dusk—or was it the effect of the port?—she looked misty, ethereal, almost alive. Mr. Binns addressed reverent words to her, assured her that she was not borjaw, and lamented her captivity in the studio. "Thou art noble and nude and hantique," he murmured once more, glancing over his shoulder at the statue of the Commande, which possessed none of those three qualities. Then he sang a little song to himself, lit his pipe, and took off his coat. "Work apace, apace, apace," he carolled. It occurred to him suddenly that he must have consumed a great quantity of port. But it didn't matter, since his depression had vanished. What

had been the cause of the depression? Oh, of course, that young imbecile Jenks. And something else. What was it? Ah!

He turned again to the statue of the Commander and shook his fist at it very slowly. "Not for you but for your missus, you old blighter," he said genially. But the smile died from his face a moment later and he sat down and brooded over the insult that Lady Bing had offered him. The more he thought of it the more intolerable it appeared. "Old virago!" said Mr. Binns, and a crafty gleam came into his eye. "Revenge!" he said suddenly and loudly, with a transpontine emphasis that would have curdled the blood of any audience. He stared at the statue, and the gleam in his eye brightened.

"I'll teach you to insult an honest man of ancient family!" he said. The statue regarded him with a cold but mocking eye. "I'll do for you!" cried Mr. Binns, dancing slowly in front of it. Presently he collided with a huge packing-case. He rubbed his elbow and inspected the object carefully. "Those fellers ought to be here by now," he murmured.

Once again he sat down in front of the Aphrodite and pondered.

"What a chance, *what* a chance!" he murmured at last. "None of the fellers know!" He began to laugh quietly to himself. "It's doing him a good turn, too!" he added. He rose, and walked up and down the studio several times, then he stood with one arm outstretched towards the Aphrodite—a memorable spectacle.

"I'll do it!" he cried. "I'll do it! Haid me, O Goddess!" He rolled up his shirt-sleeves carefully, picked up a long strip of coconut matting from the floor, and completely enveloped the statue of the Commander in its folds.

"Good night, General Sir John," said Mr. Binns affably, bowing to the enshrouded figure. At that moment he heard the sound of wheels outside. There was a knock at the door; he flung it open and went out.

"Oh, 'ere you are, Tom!" he said calmly. "You're a bit late. Are the others come? Right-oh! The case is ready. Have you got the rollers? It'll be a bit of a job to get him across the gravel."

He re-entered the studio, followed by four workmen of muscular aspect.

VIII

In the thriving city of Market Clayford there was a sound of revelry by day. The territorials, those sinewy sons of the sword, had formed up on three sides of the market-place, and behind them the local yeomanry restrained their wind-swift steeds. The firemen, in effulgent helmets, manned the tall scarlet fire-escape near the Clock Tower; in front of them was a little regiment of schoolgirls with clean pinafores and garlands of flowers, and in front of these stood the six prettiest maidens of the district (selected, at the price of his personal popularity, by Alderman Gumm) with baskets of roses which were to be strewn at the feet of the hero of the day. There was a great concourse of people and a corresponding hum of voices; the sun shone, the church-bells pealed joyously, and a brass band emitted blood-curdling bursts of popular melody.

The memorial to the General had been hoisted to its place on the pedestal in front of the Jubilee Clock Tower, but a large sheet of canvas concealed each side of it from the public eye. The delicate task of raising the statue had been performed by experts from London under the direction of Mr. Binns. A small boy who had contrived, on the day before the ceremony of unveiling, to peer through a tiny aperture in the canvas, had been rewarded by nothing but the sight of a muffled and bandaged figure and a smart rap over the knuckles from Mr. Binns, who seemed to be perpetually on guard.

It was almost noon; the crowd became denser every moment, and the hum of voices began to prove a serious rival to the softer harmonies of the band. Carriage after carriage—each containing a local celebrity—drove up to the door of the “White Hart”, the windows and balcony of which famous hostelry commanded an excellent view of the market-place. The juvenile portion of the crowd made short work of two sweet-stuff and ice-cream stalls, whilst their elders gravitated towards the bar of the “White Hart”, where, since the supply of glasses had failed, they drank benignly from jugs and bottles.

The clock struck twelve, and a cannon was fired from the Castle Hill. The headmistress made a sign to her schoolgirls

and they began to sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers", in tones that were hearty but flat. A bandsman who was playing "The Lost Chord" as a cornet solo at the far end of the market-place wavered and quavered for another moment and then gave up the struggle in despair. There was a note of savage triumph in the voices of the little girls which showed that they had observed his collapse, but their supremacy was brief. Before they had reached the end of the third verse an outburst of cheering drowned their hymn. A string of carriages was descending the Castle Hill; in the first sat the General, Lady Bing, and the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and the others contained various resplendent persons—for the most part brother officers of the General.

The carriages halted, the band played "See the Conquering Hero Comes", the Mayor and Corporation advanced to receive the hero, and Mr. Binns, who was observing the proceedings from an upper window, kissed his hand gallantly to Lady Bing, who marked him not. The General was in full uniform, and bore himself with gravity; he contrasted somewhat unfavourably with the Lord Lieutenant, a very tall, handsome nobleman with a white beard. The six damsels scattered rose-petals in the path of the warrior, and the Mayor's little daughter, a forward minx who pretended quite successfully to be shy, presented Lady Bing with a large bouquet. The crowd cheered vociferously and sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" in the local *patois*. It was indeed a memorable and brilliant scene.

There were shouts for silence, and when the din had ceased the Lord Lieutenant made a brief speech. The Lord Lieutenant's private opinion of the ceremony was that it was nonsense, and he had grave doubts whether the General would deserve a statue even when he was dead. He did not express this opinion, but made graceful allusions to the earlier exploits of the General and to the esteem which his family had enjoyed in the county for so many generations. The Lord Lieutenant's phrases were sober and his voice quiet; it was left to the Mayor to improve the occasion with the trumpet-tones of rhetoric. The Mayor was not backward.

"Well, my lord, ladies, gentlemen, and fellow-citizens," he said. "'Ere we are, met together on a very pleasant piece of business. The 'ero is returned to his native place, the war-weary veteran 'angs 'is sword on the laurels." (Cheers

and cries of "Not yet, heaps of fight in him still!") "I say, 'e 'angs 'is sword up, but does 'e 'ang it up because 'e's old, worn-out, finished? Not 'e, gentlemen; 'e does so because 'is country 'as 'eardened to the lies and slanders of 'is enemies—for every truly great man 'as enemies, my friends—and 'as said, 'You 'ave been faithful to me many years, Sir John, but they tell me you've made a mistake. I don't know if it's true, Sir John, but anyhow, you may go; I've no further use for you.' Gentlemen, you know I'm a loyal man, a true-blue Englishman, but when I 'eard of that I 'ad the most awful moment of my life. I went about for a week saying to myself, 'Oh, England, my England, don't let me be ashamed of you.' But I *am* ashamed, gentlemen; I feel that it's a foul and everlasting blot on my country's honour. Oh, my friends, we 'ave reason to be proud today, for by setting up this statue we are going to show England that though she may err and be blind, the men of Market Clayford see straight!

"The generations to come shall look on this great souljer in 'is habit as 'e lived, and perceive our names. (Have you got 'old of the string, George? Be ready and pull when I drop my right arm.) Yes, gentlemen, the time will come when the greatest soldier of our day will be recognized by 'istory, but little good'll that be to 'im, for 'e'll be dead, and 'is sword rusting above 'is grave. This is a proud thought, gentlemen, that we—alone of all Englishmen—we, the fellow-citizens and servants and friends of 'is ancient family—we, the people of Market Clayford, were able to prove to 'im that we recognized 'is greatness whilst 'e was yet with us—and long may 'e remain, for a better landlord I nor none of you ever knew—and set up to 'im in this year of grace '19 owe 5 and this market-place of our famous old city—ready, George—this imposing and sumptuous monument—the exact portrait of 'im as 'e stood undismayed like a rock amid the foaming tide of war. Pull away, George."

When the cheers died away, George was still pulling, but the canvas did not move. An expectant silence fell on the multitude, and the brass band put their instruments to their lips in readiness to burst into a triumphant paean. George pulled and pulled but nothing happened; and at length he let go the rope and straightened himself, wiping the perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand. "Drat the old thing!" he said.

It was then that a stentorian cry, which appeared to descend from heaven, echoed across the market-place. "Pull both ropes at once and keep on pulling, you fool!" it said. In reality it emanated from the upper chamber where Mr. Binns was dancing with excitement. "Get your foot against the wood and *pull*!" cried the voice.

George moistened the palms of his hands and obeyed. His friends in the crowd encouraged him gaily. "Good on yer, Jarge!" they said. "Put your back into it! Now she moves!"

In fact, she moved. The canvas curtains descended a few inches, then became fixed again. George pulled heroically, deaf to the sudden shout of surprise that went up from the crowd.

"'Ullo! It ain't 'im!" "If it's 'im it ain't a good portrait, any'ow." "Looks gallus like an angel!" "P'raps 'e's down below and the angel's leanin' over 'im." The square hummed with excitement, and everyone stood on someone else's toes and craned their necks.

Then a strange and dreadful thing happened. George made a superhuman effort, and the canvas fell away from the statue as a wave recedes from a rock, revealing, not the portly presentment of the General, but first the head, then the lovely shoulders, then the slender flanks and dainty feet of the great Goddess of Love. She stood in the sun naked and unashamed, and smiled softly upon them, as if she were glad to be there. The multitude gazed upon her for a moment in stupefied silence. The bandsmen, with their mute instruments pressed to their mouths, stared at the goddess, the Mayor gasped, the General assumed the hue of a garnet. Then the great voice rose again and rang across the square. "Venus the Goddess of Love awaiting the return of Mars the God of War!" it cried, and was still. All eyes were turned in the direction whence it came. Some of them perceived a fat man with a shiny face bobbing up and down and gesticulating in a window. Lady Bing saw him and uttered a loud cry.

"It's that odious man!" she screamed. "He's done it! Arrest him, stop him! He's brought the wrong statue on purpose!"

By the time she had explained what had happened Mr. Binns had disappeared. A vast hubbub arose from the market-place,

a hubbub which gradually resolved itself into one enormous and continued outburst of laughter. Aloof from it all, Aphrodite stood and smiled, seeming only slightly interested in the tumult that surrounded her, yet glad, on the whole, to stand in the warm sunshine and to reveal her beauty once more to the eyes of men.

THE "BOLSOVER" PRIZE



EDEN PHILLPOTTS

EDEN PHILLPOTTS abandoned insurance for literature in the nineties, and since then has been a prolific writer of novels, poems, stories, and plays, several of which, *The Farmer's Wife* in particular, have enjoyed very long runs. He lives on Dartmoor, which is the setting of many of his writings.

THE "BOLSOVER" PRIZE

I

THERE was once a chap at Dunston's, ages and ages ago, called Bolsover, who turned into a novelist afterwards ; and he was so frightfully keen about other chaps turning into novelists too that he gave a prize for composition. It was a book worth a guinea, and Dr. Dunston had to choose it each year, and only the junior school was allowed to enter for it, according to the conditions made by the chap who gave it. Gideon calculated it out, and said that as twenty pounds is about good for one pound at simple interest in an ordinary way, the novelist chap must have handed twenty pounds over to Dr. Dunston ; and Steggles said he rather doubted if the novelist chap would have much cared for the books that Dr. Dunston chose for the prizes ; because they were not novels at all, but very improving books—chiefly natural history ; which Steggles said was not good for trade from the novelist chap's point of view.

No doubt old Dunston ought to have bought stories ; and Steggles went further and said that it would have been a sporting thing for Dr. Dunston to get the novelist chap's own books, of which he wrote a great many for a living. Steggles had read one once in the holidays, but he didn't tell me much about it, excepting that there was a man who appeared to have about four wives in it, and that it had three hundred and seventy-five pages and no pictures.

Anyway, the composition prize always interested us in the lower school, and it interested me especially once, because the subject was "Wild Flowers", and my cousin, Norman Tomkins, happened to be a frightful dab at them. When he heard about it, Tomkins went instantly to Gideon, who lends money at usury, being a Jew, and said, "Look here, Gid., I'll sell you the 'Bolsover' prize for ten shillings now on the spot. As it's

worth a pound, you'll make fifty per cent. profit." And Gideon said, "The profit would be about right, but where's the prize?" And Tomkins said, "I've got to write for it on Monday week; but it's as good as mine, because nobody in the lower school knows anything about wild flowers excepting me, and I can tell you the name of thirty-four right off the reel; so there's an end of it, as far as I can see." Which shows what a hopeful sort of chap Tomkins was.

But unfortunately Gideon knew the great hopefulness of Tomkins about everything, and also knew that it did not always come off. He said, "Who are in for the prize?" And I said, "First Tomkins, then Walters, then Smythe, and also Macmullen."

"There you are," said Tomkins. "Just take them one by one and ask yourself. If it was wild animals, or queer old customs, Smythe might run me close, or even beat me; but in the subject of wild flowers he is nothing. Then young Walters doesn't know anything about anything, and his English is frightfully wild, owing to his having been born in India. Well, that only leaves Macmullen, and Macmullen's strong point is machinery. He never looked at a flower in his life. When we went out of bounds on the railway embankment, he simply sat and watched the signals work, and took down the number of a goods engine that was new to him. And when he got up, I discovered that he'd actually been sitting on a bee orchis, one of the rarest flowers in the world! When I showed him what he'd done, he merely said, 'A bee orchis? Lucky it don't sting!' So that shows he's no use. In fact, when he hears the subject hasn't got anything to do with steam power, I doubt if he'll go in."

But Gideon knew Macmullen better.

"He'll go in," he said. "His age is just right, and he won't be able to try again. He's not the chap to throw away the chance of getting a pound book just because the subject doesn't happen to be steam power. Besides, there's always time allowed to swot up the thing. I bet by Monday week Mac. will know as much about wild flowers as you do—perhaps more."

"Of course, as a chum of his, you say that," answered Tomkins. "But I've made a lifetime study of wild flowers, and it's childish to think that Macmullen, or anybody else, is going to learn all I know in a week."

"He can spell, anyway," said Gideon, "which is more than you can."

In fact, Gideon didn't seem so hopeful about Tomkins getting the prize as you might have thought, and it surprised Tomkins a good deal. Gideon had a right to speak, because in his time he'd won this prize himself. When he won it, the subject happened to be "Postage Stamps"; which was, of course, like giving the prize to Gideon, owing to his tremendous knowledge about money in every shape.

The time was July, and so next half-holiday Tomkins and me went into the country for a walk, for Tomkins to freshen up his ideas about the wild flowers.

He certainly knew a lot, but several things that I picked bothered him, and once or twice I think he was altogether wrong about them. He also picked a good many that he evidently didn't know at all, and carried them back to school to ask Mr. Briggs the names of them and anything worth mentioning about them.

Then coming back through Merivale, who should we see but Macmullen, with his nose flat against the window of an old bookshop there.

"Look here," he said, "there's a second-hand botany in here for sevenpence, and I've only got fivepence. I tried the man by showing him the fivepence all at once, but he wouldn't come down. Can one of you chaps lend me twopence till next week?"

He looked at the flowers Tomkins had picked as he spoke.

"D'you know many of them?" said Tomkins, knowing well that Mac. wouldn't.

"Only that—that nettle," said Macmullen rather doubtfully.

"It isn't a nettle," said Tomkins. But he was so pleased to see what a frightful duffer Macmullen really was that he lent him twopence on the spot.

I thought he was rather a fool to increase Macmullen's chances like this; but Tomkins said, in his large way, that a few facts out of a botany book wouldn't help Macmullen now, especially if he didn't know the difference between sage and nettles.

"By Jove, I don't believe he knows the difference between sage and onions, for that matter!" said Tomkins.

Then Mac. came out with the book, and we all went back together.

II

It was frightfully interesting to see the different ways those four chaps went about trying for the "Bolsover" prize. Tomkins got special leave off games, and spent his spare time in the lanes. He confessed to me that he was frightfully ignorant about grasses, and thought on the whole that it would be safer to leave them out of the essay. Macmullen told me that the whole subject bored him a good bit, but he thought he could learn enough about it to do something decent in a week, because a pound book was worth the fag. He was always pulling flowers to pieces, and talking about calyxes and corollas, and seed-cases, and stamens, and other wild things of that sort. I asked Tomkins if it promised well for Macmullen to learn about stamens and so on, and how to spell them; and Tomkins thought not.

Tomkins said, "Briggs may very likely favour him, as we know he has before, owing to his feeling for everything Scotch, from oatmeal downwards; but all the same, the subject is wild flowers, not botany. It's rather a poetical subject in a way, and that's no good to Macmullen. No, I don't think Mac. has any chance, though he did ask old Briggs to lend him the number of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* with 'Botany' in it, to read in playtime."

"I believe Briggs was pleased, though," I said, "for I heard him answer that Mac. was going the right way to work. Anyway, Mac. read quite half the article and copied some out on a bit of paper before he chucked it in despair."

Tomkins nodded, and I think he saw that it was rather a grave thing for Macmullen to have done.

"I might read it myself," he said. "I'm a little foggy between genera and species, and varieties and natural orders, and so on. Not that all that stuff matters. What you want is really the name of the wild flowers themselves and their colours and ways. Do you happen to know any poetry about flowers of a sort easily learned by heart?"

I didn't; but young Smythe, who was there, answered that he did.

He said, "What you say about poetry is awfully interesting to me, Tomkins, because I had thought the same. And I know many rhymes of a queer sort, and I can make rhymes

rather well myself, and I had an idea I would try and do the whole of my composition in rhyme."

"Like your cheek," said Tomkins. "My dear kid, it will take you all your time to write prose. And what do you know about flowers, anyway?"

"I do know something," said Smythe, "owing to my father, who collects odd rhymes and things. It's called folklore. It includes queer names of plants and animals; also about remedies for warts, and the charms for curing animals from witches, and overlooking, and suchlike. I know some awfully funny things, anyway, that my governor has told me, though they may not be true."

Tomkins was a good deal interested in this.

"Fancy a kid like you knowing anything at all about it!" he said.

There was only Walters left, but he was no good at all, and he'd simply gone in for it because his people insisted upon his doing so. I asked Walters if he knew much about wild flowers, and he answered something about cucumber sandwiches, which he had once eaten in large quantities owing to being forgotten at a lawn-tennis party. He seemed to think because a cucumber was a vegetable, and a flower was a vegetable, that a cucumber was a flower. He said that was all he knew about the subject, excepting that dogs ate grass when not feeding well. So I told Tomkins he needn't bother about Walters.

Tomkins, however, assured us that he wasn't bothering about any of them. He said that facts were the things, and not theories. So while Macmullen swotted away at his botany, and Smythe collected rhymes and offered anybody three links of a brass chain for a word that rhymed with toadflax, and Walters merely waited for the day, and made no effort as far as we could see, Tomkins poked about, and went one evening out of bounds, with Freckles and young Corkey, into the famous quarry at Merivale Great Wood. They were chased, but escaped owing to the strategy of Freckles; and Tomkins felt the "Bolsover" prize was now an absolute cert for him, because in the preserves he had met with an exceedingly rare flower—at least, he said so; and he believed that by mentioning it, and making a sketch of it in his paper, he would easily distance Macmullen, who did not so much as know there was such a flower.

As far as ages went, I must tell you that Tomkins was thirteen and two weeks, and Macmullen thirteen and seven months, while Smythe was ten, and Walters merely nine and a half.

All four put on a little side about it the Sunday before, and a good many other fellows wished they had gone in, because the papers had to be written in the Doctor's own study, and there are some magnificent pictures and marble statues in that room such as are very seldom seen by the lower school.

I asked each one after breakfast on the appointed day how he felt; and Tomkins said, "Hopeful"; and Macmullen said, "Much as usual"; and Smythe said, "Sleepy, because I've been awake nearly all night remembering rhymes I've heard my father say"; and Walters said he had a sort of rather horrid wish that *his* father had died the term before, because he didn't think his mother would ever have made him go in for a thing he hated so much as this.

III

Two hours were allowed for the essay, and by good luck I happened to meet the four chaps just as they came out. So I got their ideas fresh on what they'd done. Curiously enough, all four were hopeful. Tomkins, of course, I knew would be, and probably also Macmullen, but Smythe and even Walters seemed to fancy they had a chance too. This astonished me a good deal. So I said to Smythe:

"How the dickens d'you think any stuff you can have done would be near to what my cousin Tomkins has done?"

And he said:

"Because of the rhymes. I was quite astonished myself to find how they came; and I also remembered a charm for nettlerash, and some awfully peculiar sayings just at the right moment."

And Walters also declared he'd done better than he expected to do. He seemed rather flustered about it, and wouldn't give any details; but he was highly excited, and inked up to the eyes, as you might say. He gave me the idea of a chap who'd been cribbing.

Macmullen looked rather a pale-yellow colour, which

he always does look at moments of great excitement, especially just before his innings at cricket. He wouldn't say a word to a soul until he'd gone to his botany book and read up a lot of stuff. Then he felt better.

As to Tomkins, he told me privately, as his cousin, that he had got in the names of no less than forty-five plants and seven grasses.

"That *must* settle it," he said. And I said I thought so too.

Mr. Briggs corrected the essays that night, and prepared some notes upon them for the Doctor to read when the time of announcing the winner came. We all stared jolly hard at Briggs during prep. the next day, and Steggles, who has no fear of old Briggs, asked him who had won. But Briggs merely told him to mind his own business.

After prayers the next day the Doctor stopped in the chapel, which was also a schoolroom, and told everybody to remain in his place.

Then he whispered to Corkey major, and Corkey went off, and presently came back with a very swagger book bound in red leather and having a white back with gold letters upon it.

The Doctor dearly likes these occasions; and so do we, because it means missing at least one class for certain. When he once fairly begins talking, he keeps at it. Now he had the four essays on the desk in front of him, and the prize; and then he spoke to Briggs, and Briggs led up Macmullen and Tomkins and Smythe and Walters.

They knew this was coming, and had all prepared to a certain extent. I noticed that Smythe had borrowed a green tie from Webster, and that Mac. had turned his usual hue at times of excitement. Walters was still inky, despite pumice-stone.

"We have now, my boys, to make our annual award of the 'Harold Bolsover' prize for English composition," began the Doctor. "Mr. Bolsover, whose name is now not unfavourably known to his countrymen as an ingenious fabricator of romance, was educated at this seminary. To me it fell to instruct his incipient intellect and lift the vacuity of his childish mind upwards and onwards into the light of knowledge and religion.

"The art of fiction, while it must not be considered a very

lofty or important pursuit, may yet be regarded as a permissible career if the motives that guide the pen are elevated, and a high morality is the author's first consideration. Lack of leisure does not permit me to read story-books myself; but I have little doubt that Mr. Bolsover's work is all that it should be from the Christian standpoint, and I feel confident that those lessons of charity, patience, loyalty, and honour, which he learnt from my own lips, have borne worthy fruit in his industrious brain.

"The work I have selected for the 'Bolsover' prize is *Gilpin on Forest Scenery*—a book which leads us from Nature to the contemplation of the Power above and behind Nature; a book wherein the reverend author has excelled himself and presented to our minds the loftiest thoughts, and to our eyes the most noble scenes, that this observance could record, and his skill compass within the space of a volume.

"For this notable reward four lads have entered in competition, and their emulation was excited by the theme of 'Wild Flowers', which your senior master, Mr. Briggs, very happily selected. Wild flowers are the jewellery of our hedgerows, scattered lavishly by Nature's own generous hand to gladden the dusty wayside—to bring a smile to the face of the wanderer in the highway, and brightness to the eyes of the weary traveller by flood and field. None of you can have overlooked them. On your road to your sport—even in the very grass whereon you pursue your pastimes—the wild flowers abound. They deck the level sward; they smile at us from the cricket-field; they help to gladden the hour of mimic victory, or soften the bitter moment of failure, as we return defeated to the silent throng at the pavilion rails.

"Now, I have before me the thoughts of Nicol Macmullen, Norman Tomkins, Huxley Smythe, and Rupert Walters on this subject; and I very much regret to say that not one of them has produced anything which may be considered worthy of Merivale, worthy of Mr. Bolsover, or worthy of themselves. I do not overlook their tender years; I am not forgetting that to a mind like my own or that of Mr. Briggs—richly stored with all the best and most beautiful utterances on this subject—the crudities of immaturity must come with the profound and pitiful significance of contrast. No, no—I judge these four achievements from no possible standard of perfection. I know too well how little can be expected from the boy who is

but entering upon his teens—I am too familiar with the meagre attainments of the average lad of one decade to ask for impossible accuracy, for poetic thought, or pious sentiments ; but certain qualities I have the right to expect—nay, demand——”

Here Steggles whispered to me :

“Blessed if I don’t think he’s going to cane them !”

“Certain qualities Mr. Harold Bolsover has also the right to expect and demand. Do we find them in these essays before us ? Reluctantly I reply, we do not. But in order that you may judge whether your head-master is unreasonable, that you of the upper school may estimate the nature of the efforts upon which I base this adverse criticism, I propose to read brief extracts from each and from all of them.

“The initial error of the boy Nicol Macmullen appears to be a total misconception of the theme he was invited to illuminate. He begins his essay as follows.”

The Doctor made a frightful rustling among Mac.’s papers, and everybody looked at Mac. He had not expected this, and his mouth worked very rummily, and his head went down between his shoulders, and he showed his under-teeth and stared in a frightfully fixed way at the boot of Smythe who sat next to him.

Then Dr. Dunston began :

“ WILD FLOWERS.

“ By NICOL MACMULLEN.

“The vegetable kingdom is a very large one. John Ray, a native of Sussex, did much to advance the study of it. He was born in 1628, and died in 1705. There was a history of plants written three hundred years before Christ. Linnaeus was the man who invented the sexual system—a very useful invention. It is a stepping-stone. He first mentioned it in 1736. Seaweeds are also part of the vegetable kingdom, but they have no flowers, and so may be dismissed without further mention. Also Algae. Of leaves, it may be said that some fall and some do not. At least, speaking strictly, all fall, and this is called a deciduous tree ; but not all at once, and this is called an evergreen. Glands occur in the tissue of the leaves, and they also have hairs. Buds also have hairs. The organs of plants is almost the largest subject in the vegetable kingdom, but I have no time to mention more than one or two organs today. The root descends unto the soil, the stems rise

aloft, and the flowers bud out at the ends of them. Mistletoe and broom-rape are called parasites, because they live on other trees, instead of being on their own.

"Coming now to flowers, we find that they may be divided into two main families : wild and garden. We shall dismiss garden flowers, as they do not belong to our subject, but wild flowers are the most beautiful things in the vegetable kingdom. Especially honeysuckle and blackberries. Many others will occur to the reader also. The flower is the *tout ensemble* of those organs which are concerned in reproduction."

The Doctor stopped and put down Macmullen's essay. For my part, I was simply amazed at the amount Mac. knew, and I think everybody else was ; but, strangely enough, the Doctor didn't like it.

"From this point our author quotes *verbatim* out of the pages of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*," continued Dr. Dunston. "As an effort of memory the result is highly creditable, and Macmullen will have acquired a great deal of botanical knowledge which may possibly be of service to him in his future career ; but as an essayist on wild flowers he is exceedingly evasive, and his effort fails radically and fundamentally. The subject is obviously not one that appeals to him. There is no sympathy, no love of his theme ; above all, no moral deductions. Macmullen's mind has not been uplifted. He has, in fact, failed."

Mac. didn't seem to care as much as you would have thought. He told me afterwards he felt so thankful when the Doctor shut up about him and turned to Tomkins, that he forgot everything else but relief.

Tomkins became red when the Doctor picked up his essay ; but it soon faded away—I mean the redness.

"Now here," said Dr. Dunston, "we are met by an attempt of a very different character. The boy Tomkins appears to think that there is nothing more to be said about the flowers of the field than to utter their names. His prose lacks dignity ; there is a feverish desire to tell us what everything is called. There is no poetry, no feeling. Vagueness, indeed, we have, but vagueness is not poetry, though to uncritical minds it may sometimes pass for such. This is how Tomkins approaches the subject. There is a breathlessness, a feeling of haste, as if somebody was chasing Tomkins along the road while he was making his researches. This, unless Tomkins has been guilty

of trespass—an alternative I refuse to consider—is difficult to explain."

The Doctor then gave us a bit out of Tomkins :

"As one walks down a country lane, one can often hardly see the leaves for the flowers. They burst upon the view in millions. The hedges are thronged with them ; the scent is overpowering. Turn where you will, they greet the bewildered eye. They hang from the trees and spring from the earth ; they twine also—as, for instance, briony and convolvuluses. At a single glance I take in dog-roses ; champions of several sorts, including white ; shepherd's purse—a weed ; strawberry, primroses, cuckoo-flower, violet, bugle, herb Robert, and also other wild geraniums of various kinds. They are in a crowded mass, all struggling for life. Stitchwort, nettle, archangel, cock's-foot grass, clematis, dock, heath, furze, bog-moss, darnel, dandelions, daisies, buttercups of sorts, marsh-mallow, water-lilies, rushes and reeds, poppies and peppermint, also ferns—one sees them all at a glance. Then, as one hastens swiftly onwards——

"I gasp for breath," said the Doctor ; "I absolutely refuse to hasten swiftly onwards with Tomkins. At this breakneck pace he drags us through that portion of the British flora at his command. There is doubtless knowledge here ; there is even reflection, as when he says, at the end of his paper, that wild flowers ought to make us thankful for our eyesight and for the lesser gift of smell. But, taken as a whole, we have no balance, absolutely no repose, no light, and no shade. There is too much hurry and bustle, too little feeling for the beauty attaching to English scenery or English prose ; too eager a desire to display erudition in the empty matter of floral nomenclature."

So that was the end of Tomkins. He was frightfully disappointed ; but he felt so interested to know what wretched chaps like Smythe and Walters had done that was better, that he forgot even to be miserable about losing until afterwards.

Then the Doctor went for Smythe.

"Huxley Smythe next challenges our attention," he said. "Now, here we are confronted with a still more amazing misunderstanding. Smythe appears to know absolutely nothing whatever concerning wild flowers ; but he has seized this occasion to display an extraordinary amount of peculiar

information upon other matters. He evidently imagines that this will answer his purpose equally well. Moreover, he endeavours to cast his work in a poetic form—with results that have bewildered even me, despite my half-century of knowledge of the *genus puer*. I do not say that rhyme is inadmissible. You shall not find me slow to encourage originality of thought even among the least of you ; but Smythe trusts too little to himself and too much to other rhymesters—I will not call them poets. He has committed to memory many verses of a trivial and even offensive character. He has furnished me with a charm or incantation to remove warts. Elsewhere he commits himself to sentiments that may be described as flagrantly irreligious. It is true he glances obliquely at his subject from time to time ; but not in a spirit which I can admire or commend. We have, for instance, these lines :

“Put yarrow under your pillow, they say,
You will see your true love the very next day.

For pain in the stomach an excellent thing
Is tea made of mint and sprigs of ling.

If you wash your clothes on Good Friday, someone
Will be certain to die ere the year is done.

“Whence Huxley Smythe has culled these pitiful superstitions I know not,” continued the Doctor ; “but he appears to be a veritable storehouse and compendium of them. They remind me only too painfully of a certain tiger’s tail, though that incident is closed, and I desire to make no further mention of it. Had our theme been folk-lore, or those crude, benighted and indelicate fancies still prevailing among the bucolic population, Smythe must have conquered, and easily conquered. It is not so, however. He has chosen the occasion of the ‘Bolsover’ competition to reveal no little fantastic knowledge ; but its lack of appropriate and apposite qualities effectually disposes of his claim. I will give you a last sample of his methods. Apropos of absolutely nothing, on page four of his dissertation, Smythe submits this impertinence. He appears suddenly to have recollected it and inserted it in the body of his work, without the least consideration for its significance or my feelings.

"There was an old man who lived in a wood
As you may plainly see,
And said he could do more work in a day
Than his wife could do in three."

The Doctor looked awfully stern at Smythe.

"This fragment—from some coarse old ballad, I suspect—is thrust upon me, as one might brandish a club in the face of an unoffending citizen. Smythe must chasten his taste and study the rudiments of logic and propriety before again he ventures to challenge our attention with original thoughts. Silence! Silence!" thundered the Doctor in conclusion; because Smythe's stuff made Steggles laugh out loud. Then several other chaps laughed, and in trying not to laugh, Wolf minor choked and made a noise like a football exploding, that was far worse than laughter.

"There remains the effort of Rupert Walters," went on Dr. Dunston. "He is the youngest of the competitors, and I find but little to praise in his achievement; yet it indicates a shadow of promise and a shade of imagination. Indeed, Mr. Briggs at first suspected that Walters had availed himself of secret and dishonest assistance; but this, I rejoice to know, is not the case. Walters has yet to learn to control the discharge of ink from his pen, and in matters of orthography also there is much to be desired for him—a remark which applies to all the competitors save Macmullen—but he possesses a dim and misty nucleus of feeling for the dignity of his native tongue. There is in his attempt a suggestion that at some distant date, if he is spared, and if he labours assiduously in the dead languages, Rupert Walters may control his living speech with some approach to distinction. I select his most pleasing passage."

The Doctor regarded young Walters over his spectacles for a moment with a frightfully encouraging expression that he sometimes puts on when things are going extra well. Then he read the pleasing passage, as he called it.

"Often, walking in the country far from home, you may see the briars falling over the sides of the lanes, and the may trees white with bloom. They look lovely against the blue sky; and a curious thing is that the distant trees also look blue, and not green, by reason of distance. Near at hand, yellow and red flowers may be dotted about; but when you look along the lane,

you only see haze, which is beautiful. If there is a river flowing near by, it is also very beautiful indeed, especially with water-lilies on it. And clouds are lovely too, if reflected in a sheet of water beside which yellow irises spring up, and their foliage looks rather bluish. If a trout rises, it makes white rings on the water.

"Now here," said the Doctor, "is a humble effort to set down what the eye of this tender boy has mirrored in the past. I need not tell you how he spells 'irises', or 'curious', or 'beautiful'. The fact remains that he has distanced his competitors and achieved the 'Bolsover' prize. Come hither, Rupert Walters. Let me shake your hand, my lad!"

So that was the end of it, and Walters seemed more frightened than anything. But he took his book, and the matter ended, and the four chaps had their essays back, with Briggs' red pencil remarks on them, to send home to their people.

The extraordinary truth only came to me three days later, when I happened to be having a talk with Walters and looking at his prize, which was duller even than most prizes. I said:

"How the dickens did you remember that trees looked blue seen a mile off?"

And he said:

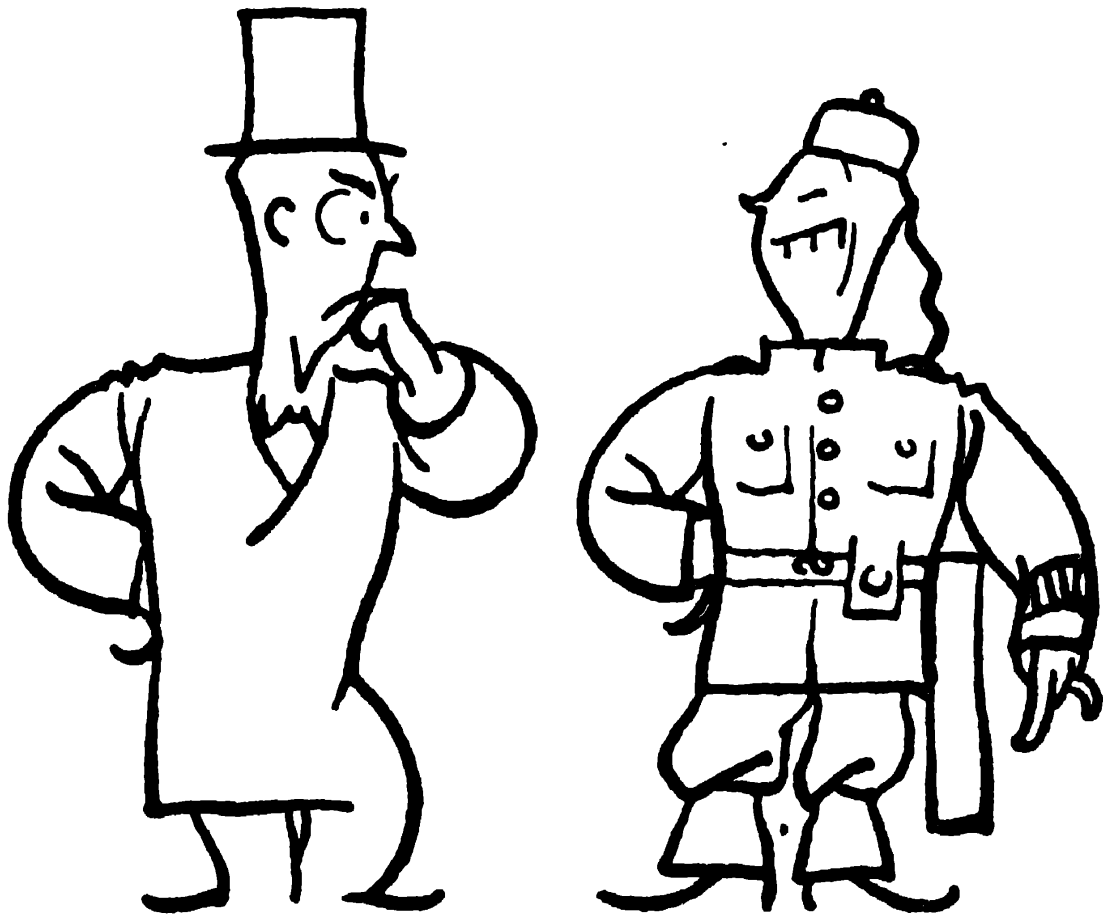
"I didn't remember it. If you'll swear not to tell, I'll explain. I shall be rather glad to tell somebody."

So I swore. Then Walters said:

"I was just sitting biting my pen and drawing on the blotting-paper and casting my eyes about and wondering what on earth to say, when I saw right bang in front of me a great picture—a whacker—full of trees and a lane, and water and hills, and every mortal thing, even to the flowers dabbed about in front. Well—there you are! I just tried to put down what I saw. And I did it only too well, if anything. Of course, in a sort of way, it was cribbing; but then, of course, in another sort of way, it wasn't. Anyway, you've sworn not to tell—not even Tomkins; so of course you won't tell."

And of course I didn't.

GIBSON AND THE WAGER



DENIS MACKAIL

DENIS MACKAIL comes of an artistic and literary family, being the son of a former Professor of Poetry at Oxford and grandson of Burne-Jones. His books are noted for their amusing and lifelike delineation of character, and the most popular of them are probably *Bill the Bachelor*, *The Flower Show*, and *Greenery Street*.

GIBSON AND THE WAGER

I WONDER if you have ever paused to consider," said Gibson, sinking back into the arm-chair next to mine, and crossing his legs, "what a debt you writers owe to the Savoy Hotel.

"No, no," he added, as I was about to reply to this observation, "I'm not speaking in terms of money. So far as that goes, I agree with you that very few writers ever enter the Savoy at all—except as other people's guests. But I was thinking of the indispensable part which that particular hotel has come to play in the opening scenes of what are generally known as 'Shockers'. However successful rival establishments may be in other respects, the position of the Savoy as the one suitable setting for the beginning of this kind of story remains unassailable. I fancy that its closeness to the river may have something to do with this; for there seems a very general belief among authors of fiction that once you have got your characters on to the Thames Embankment all ordinary laws of probability are suspended. Curiously enough, I have noticed the same feeling in New York in connection with Riverside Drive. What is it, I wonder, about these waterside boulevards . . ."

He paused meditatively for a moment, and then continued:

"And yet, after all, there may be more in it than one would at first sight believe. There is no smoke without fire, you know. And, oddly enough, one of the strangest experiences in my own life had its origin in a dinner at the Café Parisien at the Savoy."

I saw now where he had been leading me.

"Perhaps you will tell me about it?" I suggested.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," he replied; and he began his story at once.

Although he has played many minor parts in his time (said

Gibson), it is quite likely that you have never heard of my friend John Freemantle, the actor. I certainly doubt whether I should ever have heard of him myself, but for the fact that in the distant past we were schoolfellows together. And even so, if we had not always kept up a fluctuating kind of acquaintanceship, his name would have meant nothing to me on a theatre programme; for until he left school and was given his first part—as one of twenty-five guests at a bigamous wedding—he had been known to the world more simply and less euphoniously as J. F. Snell.

Perhaps it was his experience of the temptation which he had thus afforded to the shafts of schoolboy wit which made him abandon his original surname and expand his initials; possibly there were family reasons of which he never told me; but in any case it was as John Freemantle that he assumed, with great satisfaction to himself, a series of more or less insignificant roles on the London and provincial boards. Fortunately for him, he was possessed of quite adequate private means, and so long as he could pass through a stage door about half past seven for six nights in a week, change his clothes, smear his face, exhibit the result to the public, and leave again about half past eleven, he was perfectly happy, and perfectly harmless. It was only in the intervals between his engagements that he would develop signs of a certain sensitiveness about his career and his profession which made him a little exhausting to the people whom he met. And as he was incapable in any circumstances of discussing any subject unconnected with the stage, I, at any rate, had come to take special pains only to see him when I was certain that he was in what he used to call a "shop".

But when, one day, I found a telephone message waiting for me which contained an invitation to dine with Mr. Freemantle at the Savoy Hotel—where he was then staying—at seven o'clock sharp, I had very little hesitation in accepting it. For not only did it seem incredible to me that anyone could wish to dine at such an hour unless they had some immediate and pressing reason, but I also remembered, as it happened, that I had read a notice of a new play, well within the last three weeks, in which John Freemantle's name had actually been mentioned. Of course it was a bit awkward that I had neither seen this entertainment nor, for the moment, could recall its title, but still, with less than an hour for our

dinner, there seemed to be considerable hope that a little tactful lying would enable me to conceal these facts.

I found him waiting for me when I arrived, and he seized my forearm affectionately with a sort of Shakespearean grip.

"Good lad," he said, throwing the words well off his chest. "Shall we to the banquet?"

"Oh, rather," I answered, shaking myself free. I got rid of my hat and coat, and we went through into the Café Parisien.

John Freemantle seemed to be well known to the waiters, and a group of them conducted us to a table by the wall. For some minutes all conversation was directed to the subject of food, but I knew that as soon as this had been settled I would be expected to talk about the stage; and as, after all, I was getting a very good dinner for nothing, I couched my preliminary observation in the form which I felt would make it easiest for my host to include also in his answer some reference to himself.

"Well, John," I said—I called him "John" more because he called me "Henry" than because we were really intimate—"Well, John, how's the show going?"

This seemed to me the very essence of tact. But to my surprise his face darkened, his brows descended, his lip curled, and his voice shook with passion.

"The show!" he snorted. "It came off on Saturday. Killed dead by the critics—curse their souls!"

I'm afraid my next remark escaped me before I could stop it.

"Then why on earth are we dining so early?" I asked.

Yet, as a matter of fact, I could hardly have said anything which would more quickly have restored John Freemantle's conceit. He looked round, gathered in the eyes of the nearest half-dozen diners, settled his tie with a flourish, and answered in a very loud voice: "The fact is, old man, that I'm so used to dining early before the theatre, that I quite forgot to make it later."

Again he looked at the neighbouring tables, collected his meed of imaginary applause, and attacked his *consommé*. I was left wondering, for the thousandth time, why it was that actors should, simply by virtue of their calling and quite irrespective of their merits or success in it, suffer under such an inexplicable delusion as to their importance in the eyes of

the general public. From the expression on John Freemantle's face one might have thought that he had just said, "I always dine early because it is my practice to qualify for the Royal Humane Society's medal immediately afterwards", or, "because it is my custom to spend the evening discovering the North Pole".

But, poor fellow, his complacency didn't last long. He entertained me during the fish and entrée with details of the alleged conspiracy which had resulted in his last engagement terminating so suddenly, and from then on he delivered a series of slashing attacks on all the most celebrated professionals of the day. This one was known to owe his success to Court influence, that one had never been sober for twenty-five years, and yet another had only escaped prosecution for the most unmentionable crimes by leaving hastily on a world tour. As for acting, of course they could none of them ever hope to act. They couldn't play gentlemen because they had all been brought up at reformatories, and they couldn't play character parts because they hadn't even troubled to master the elements of make-up; or if they had, then they were too conceited to risk spoiling their own beauty.

"But wait a minute," I said at this point. "Surely you'll admit that Dash"—I named a well-known tragedian who had recently become his own manager—"surely you'll admit that Dash knows how to make up? I shall never forget seeing him as the hump-backed negro in—in whatever the thing was called."

"Dash?" sneered John Freemantle, snapping his fingers; and then, a little inconsequentially as it seemed to me, he added: "Did you ever see me as the old grandfather in *Mrs. Murgatroyd's Mistake*?"

Strangely enough, I had. In the play in question John Freemantle had appeared on the stage for rather under two minutes, but on me at any rate he had made a deep and lasting impression. Never in my life had I seen anyone so incredibly ancient, so completely gone at the knees, so amazingly quavering about the voice, or so incomparably unlike anything in heaven or earth. A very conservative estimate would have set this grandfather's age at two hundred and fifty years—and even at that no one could say that he had worn well.

"Do you know," pursued John, fixing me with his eyes,

"that it used to take me two hours to make up for that part every night, and another hour and a half to get it off again?"

"No!" I exclaimed. "Did it really?"

"It did, though," he answered. "Why, at the dress rehearsal they nearly had me turned out of the theatre. No one had the least idea who I was. That was something like a make-up!"

"It was indeed," I said fervently.

"But it isn't only old men that I can manage so well," he went on, smiling happily. "Why, I'd bet you five pounds that I could come up to you in any character that you like to mention, and until I told you, you'd never guess who it was."

This, I thought, was going a bit far. Even such a masterpiece as the old grandfather must have aroused my suspicions anywhere but at a theatre.

"I'll bet you ten pounds you couldn't," I retorted. "Why, of course I should know you."

John Freemantle slapped the tablecloth with his hand.

"Done!" he exclaimed. "Now, look here. Ten pounds in even money that I come up and speak to you, and that you don't know who I am until I tell you. Is it a go?"

"Of course it is," I said. "That tenner will suit me very well. But wait a second; we must have a time limit. I'm not going to go on looking out for you in one disguise after another for the rest of my life."

"I'm only going to try it once," said John, "because that will be quite enough. But to make it easier for you, I'll give myself a time limit of three days. Now, then, we'll start from when you leave the Savoy tonight. Is that all right?"

"Quite," I said. "So I'll begin spending the money at once." And I called to the waiter to bring us some still bigger cigars.

"Help yourself," I said to John. "No one can say that I'm not generous with my winnings."

He took his gift at once, but so moody and abstracted had he suddenly become that it was fully five minutes before he remembered to light it; and from then onwards until I left him I could see that his whole mind was given up to considering exactly what form of disguise he should assume for my benefit. Such answers as he made to my observations showed clearly that his thoughts were anywhere but in the Café Parisien, and at last, shortly before ten, worn out by his

silence and preoccupation, I got up, and said I must be going. If I had stayed any longer, I should have begun to yawn in his face.

"Look here," he said, frowning ponderously; "about this bet. You'll promise not to say afterwards that you knew it was me all the time?"

"My dear John," I answered with dignity, "I am an Englishman and a sportsman. Of course, I shall be scrupulously honest over this business. If I don't answer you inside two minutes by saying 'Hullo, John!' then the money is yours. Is that good enough for you?"

"Oh, I don't want to make it as difficult for you as all that," he protested.

"You are at liberty to make it as difficult as ever you can," I said. And having thanked him again for my evening's entertainment, I saw him into the lift and turned to leave the hotel.

But at this moment, as chance would have it, I suddenly felt a slap on the back, and looking round saw a second cousin of mine, named Aubrey Wotherspoon, and his wife.

"Hullo," said Aubrey heartily. "The very man we want. Marjorie's dead keen on dancing, and I've twisted my hock." (He was a hunting man, as you may have gathered.) "Come along to the ballroom and give her a turn."

Of course I said I should be delighted; I couldn't very well say anything else; and for more than another hour Marjorie and I capered together over the parquet, while Aubrey sat beaming at us by the wall. I have never been a very good dancer, but my partner made it as easy for me as she could; and I was just getting properly into my stride, as it were, when some other friends of theirs came drifting in from a theatre and I found myself released. For another ten minutes or so I hung about, waiting to see if I should be wanted again. But Marjorie was now hard at work with a young man who dipped and plunged like a pro., and I realized that I had served my turn. I said good night to Aubrey, collected my hat and coat, and went out into the Strand.

The rain which had been falling when I arrived had now stopped, and after my evening in the well-heated hotel, I thought it would be pleasant to walk at any rate some of the way home towards Down Street, where I then lived. I set off at once at a steady pace.

I had reached the neighbourhood of Leicester Square without meeting with any adventures, but at this point my wandering thoughts were suddenly recalled to this world. A figure in a raincoat and a battered felt hat had come darting out of an archway, and before I could slip to one side or ward him off, he and I became involved in a kind of staggering embrace.

"Look out where you're going, sir," I said, shoving him away from me. And as I did so, the figure looked up at me cringingly. In the light from the nearest street lamp I saw a villainous, wrinkled, yellow face; the face, in fact, of an unmistakable Chinaman.

He stood there, showing his discoloured teeth in a grin of cowardly defiance, and at the same moment a sudden light burst upon me. I stepped forward again.

"Hullo, John," I said cheerily. "Where's my ten pounds?"

I just had time to see the look of horror and surprise which flashed into his countenance, when a heavy hand descended on my shoulder from behind.

"Now then, now then," said a gruff voice. "What about it?"

I looked round quickly, and found myself in the grip of an enormous police-constable. With his other hand he had already caught hold of the supposed Chinaman by the sleeve of his raincoat.

"Vine Street," said the policeman laconically. "Now come along like good boys."

I peered under his helmet. For the moment the thought had darted into my mind that it might be he, and not the Chinaman, who was really John Freemantle. But he was a good six inches too tall. I turned back again.

"Come on, John," I said. "Tell him what you're doing."

"None of that," the policeman broke in. "I seed what you was doing all right; and I 'eard what you said. You come along quiet."

"You don't understand, Sergeant," I said. "This gentleman is a friend of mine. We're doing this for a bet."

"You tell that to the superintendent," replied the policeman. "If you say anything else, I shall 'ave to report it. 'Ere," he added, raising his voice to a passing taxi-driver. The car slowed down and stopped by the kerb.

"In you get," said the policeman.

There seemed nothing for it but to obey. If John chose to carry his joke as far as the police-station, the only alternative was a free fight on the pavement.

"Vine Street," shouted the policeman out of the window, and off we went.

The next thing of which I became aware was that my fellow-prisoner was leaning heavily against me on the back seat ; and as I tried to edge away from him, he seized my hand and, with a whispered word which I failed to catch, forced something into it that felt like an envelope. I supposed that this was the ten pounds ; that John meant—for some reason which only an actor could understand—to carry his imposture through to the finish ; and that this was his way of getting me to back him up. I slipped it quietly into my pocket, wondering what the deuce he was going to do when we reached the police-station.

But at this moment we swung into the brilliant lights of Piccadilly Circus. I turned my head to inspect, with the help of this illumination, the details of my friend's unexpectedly successful make-up ; and I saw at once what you have probably already guessed. The man wasn't John Freemantle at all. No disguise on earth could have transformed my old schoolfellow's well-marked features into that flattened mask. I felt a brief sensation of indescribable nausea. And then, as the cab moved forward out of the block in which it had been waiting, I took a desperate resolution.

"Look here, Inspector," I said, addressing the policeman. "I give you my word that this thing's a mistake. I've never seen this man before in my life. Now, if five pounds——"

"That'll do," snapped the incorruptible official. "You'll be sorry you said that, my man."

"No, I won't," I said ; and at the same moment I flung myself at the door of the cab, wrenched the handle back, fell heavily into the street, bounded up again, and was off as fast as I could possibly tear. From behind me I could hear a roar of baffled rage, but I never looked round for a second. I dodged in front of a motor-omnibus, scattered a group of pedestrians on the pavement, dived down the alley by the side of St. James's Church, swung across Jermyn Street and down York Street, and never stopped until I had reached the Wanderers' Club in St. James's Square. I hurtled through the glass doors.

"Is Mr. Smithson in the Club?" I asked breathlessly of the porter.

I had chosen the first name that had entered my head, for there was no time to stop and think, but to my surprise I seemed to have hit on a real one. I saw the porter hastily setting my dress clothes against my muddy and exhausted appearance, and deciding that they could be held to excuse the manner of my intrusion, and then he answered:

"I don't think so, sir. But if you'll wait in here, I'll go and make sure."

I found myself conducted into a little sort of waiting-room leading out of the hall, and there I did my best to regain my breath while the porter went on his search. In a couple of minutes he was back again.

"No, sir," he informed me. "Mr. Smithson left half an hour ago."

"Too bad," I said. "Well, I must try and get him at home." I crossed to the window and pulled back the curtain, as if to see whether it were still raining. There was no one in sight outside. My captor must, I thought, have decided to stick to his bird in the hand and to let me go. It seemed to me a very sensible decision.

"Well, good night," I said. "I'm sorry to have troubled you. By the way, could you lend me a clothes-brush for a moment? I've been rather badly splashed by a taxi."

"Certainly, sir," said the porter, and he most obligingly detailed an underling to assist in removing the signs of my recent adventure. Again I expressed my thanks, and then, with a rapid glance from the porch which still revealed a deserted pavement, I turned up the collar of my coat and moved quickly away.

I had reached St. James's Street without further molestation, and had just decided to treat myself to a cigarette when, in feeling in my pocket for my case, my hand lighted unexpectedly on something else.

"By Jove!" I muttered, pulling out the envelope which was now my only souvenir of that brief but unpleasant cab ride. "I wonder what's in it."

I moved nearer to a lamp-post and examined the outside. The flap was gummed firmly down along its whole length, and apart from certain dirty smudges both sides were completely blank. As I pinched it thoughtfully between my finger

and thumb, its contents seemed to yield and shift beneath the pressure. "Well, why not?" I asked myself, and with a quick movement I tore off one of the corners.

It was half full of what looked, at first sight, like tooth-powder. And yet was it likely that anyone with teeth like the ones I remembered in that Chinaman's mouth could have any real use for such stuff? I thought of tasting it, but no, it might be some kind of poison. I thought of throwing it away, but this seemed rather unadventurous. Finally, I inserted a cautious finger, brought it out again with a little of the powder on the end, and—very gingerly—bent over it to discover how it smelt.

It was exactly at this moment that I heard a hoarse voice addressing me.

"Cheese it," said this voice in urgent tones. "Do you want the bulls after you?"

I spun round quickly. There was an outlandish-looking man standing by my side, with a black beard and a broad-brimmed hat—rather like a stage conspirator.

"Bulls?" I repeated. "What on earth do you mean?"

"You'll see what I mean all right," he said huskily, "if you start sniffing snow on the middle of the pavement."

"Snow?" I echoed. "But this can't be snow."

"Coke, then," he substituted.

"And still less is it coke," I added.

"Say," said the bearded man; "you're pretty fresh, ain't you?"

Again his meaning seemed to have escaped me. I peered questioningly into his face, and at the same instant something unnatural about the way that his beard joined his cheek connected itself suddenly with a thought which in the excitement of my escape had almost gone out of my head. How on earth John Freemantle had managed to shadow me all the evening without my noticing him I had no idea; but if I were quick, my ten pounds would still be safe.

"Hullo, John!" I said loudly. "You nearly had me then."

He looked at me in a kind of puzzled fury, but I wasn't going to stand for any more bluff.

"Come on," I said encouragingly. "Off with the jolly old beard."

At once a venomous look came into his dark eyes. He made a quick feint with his left hand, and as I started back

he snatched the envelope from me, dealt me a savage kick on the leg, and the next moment was tearing away down the hill.

"Dash it all," I thought. "I must have made another mistake." And then, as a second wave of agony swept over my injured limb, I lifted up my voice.

"Hi!" I shouted. "Hi! Come here at once!"

He turned his head for an instant—I can only imagine to yell some parting defiance—and, as he did so, I saw a vast, tenebrous figure step out from the darkness of a shop entrance and lift him clean off his feet with one hand.

"Now then," said this apparition warningly, and then he too saw the envelope. "Ah, would you?" he growled, closing a gigantic fist over it. "Got you with the goods this time, Jack, eh?"

Although, I had, as you know, very special reasons just at the moment for avoiding all unnecessary dealings with the Metropolitan Police, and although there could be no shadow of doubt that this mammoth figure was a plain-clothes officer, my curiosity overcame me. I drew nearer to the little tableau.

"Are you coming quiet, now?" I heard the detective inquire, and even the unwelcome familiarity of his words hadn't the power to drive me away.

"None of your frame-ups," snarled the captive, wriggling impotently. "I was given that envelope by that guy over there. I ain't got no more notion what's in it than nobody at all. And take your fist out of my windpipe," he added feebly.

The plain-clothes officer looked at me suspiciously, but it was too late to retire. I opened my overcoat, so that my dress-shirt should show to the best effect.

"What's that he says?" I asked haughtily.

The officer saluted with his free hand.

"Says you gave him this 'ere packet of dope," he announced. "I'm afraid I'll have to trouble you for your name and address, sir."

Once more I saw Vine Street looming before me. But there was no time for hedging.

"That's all right, Officer," I said. "Smithson's my name. The Wanderers' Club. I'm sorry I haven't got a card on me."

"And 'ave you ever seen this man before?" he asked, dangling his prisoner at me by the scruff of the neck.

"Yes," I said, remembering that our whole interview must have been witnessed. "He came up and spoke to me just now, and for a second I mistook him for a friend. But I discovered at once that I was wrong."

"And you didn't give him nothing?"

"On the contrary," I said. "He gave me a very vicious kick. But I think he's in safe hands now, eh?"

Strangled noises were coming from the prisoner's throat, but the detective paid no attention to them.

"Quite safe, sir," he chuckled gruffly. "I don't suppose we'll have to trouble you about this again."

"I'm very glad to hear it," I said truthfully.

"I've got all the evidence I want in this little envelope," explained the plain-clothes man. "We've been after him the best part of a week, but we've got him properly now. Smithson, did you say, sir? Thank you, sir. Good night to you, sir."

I watched them marching off together, their back view presenting a very deceitful picture of the friendliness of their relations, and then, once again, I turned up towards Piccadilly. It struck me that what with the Chinaman, the Conspirator, and Mr. Smithson of the Wanderers' Club, the detective force at Vine Street would find themselves presented with as pretty a problem as any that could have come their way for quite a considerable time. Yet it also occurred to me that it might be a good thing if I hurried on certain plans which I had at this time for paying a visit of some months to the Continent.

Meanwhile I was becoming increasingly aware of a painful stiffness in the leg which had been subjected to the double strain of my leap from the moving taxi-cab and of the alleged dope-fiend's attack. By the time I reached the corner of my own street, I really could hardly walk; and between this corner and the door of my flat I should think that I must have stopped nearly a dozen times, while I clutched at the railings and relieved myself with a selection of groans and curses. But at length I dragged myself up my stairs and, taking out my latchkey, opened my own front door.

As I did so, I had a strange impression of a brief flash of light through the door of my sitting-room. It was gone as quickly as it had appeared, but as mine was a service flat, into which no one with any business to do so could be

expected to enter for another six or seven hours, I raised my voice and called out.

"Hullo," I said. "Is anyone there?"

Dead silence greeted this inquiry. After all, I thought, perhaps I imagined it, or perhaps it was a light from some vehicle in the street shining for a moment through the window. I slipped off my overcoat, dropped my hat on to a chair, and, crossing the hall, switched on the light in my bathroom.

At this point the telephone-bell in the sitting-room suddenly began to peal.

"Oh, curse the thing!" I muttered, and once again I limped out into the hall. Who on earth, I wondered, could want to ring me up at nearly one in the morning? Another of those infernal wrong numbers, most likely.

I put my hand on the switch just inside the sitting-room door, and turned on the light. The next moment both my arms had shot up in the air, in obedience to an irresistibly worded command. Standing in the middle of the room was a seedy-looking man with an uncommonly dirty face, and in his right hand, which was directed unwaveringly towards my waistcoat, was a horrible little black automatic pistol.

"And keep 'em up," added this alarming vision, taking a step towards me.

"This," I thought, "is quite unmistakably my unlucky evening. I wonder what happens next." But I said nothing; I only reflected on the extreme annoyance which it would cause me should that automatic pistol accidentally go off.

"Nah, then," said the seedy-looking man. "Wot are *you* doing 'ere?"

But for the presence of that pistol my retort would have been obvious. For the moment, however, the *tu quoque* struck me as a very much over-rated form of repartee.

"Dash it all," I protested. "This is my flat."

"Wot?" said the seedy-looking man. "But you're not the Honourable Wokingham?"

Nothing exasperates me more than the misuse by the lower orders of courtesy titles.

"Mr. Wokingham," I said with great emphasis, "lives upstairs."

"Blimey!" exclaimed the seedy-looking man. "I've been and cracked the wrong crib!"

All this time the telephone-bell had continued to ring, but

at this point it stopped abruptly, and with the cessation of sound a sudden idea came flashing into my mind. Did *bona fide* burglars, I asked myself, ever really say "Blimey"? Wasn't there something a little stagey about that reference to cracking a crib? And what was more, didn't John Freemantle know perfectly well that I lived in the same block of flats as Fred Wokingham? I dropped my hands and opened my mouth.

"Hullo, John," I said. "You nearly——"

Bang went the automatic pistol; there was a shivering of glass just to the left of my head, where the "Monarch of the Glen" hung; and my arms went up again like a jack-in-the-box.

"Look out, you fool——" I began, but my words were cut short at once.

"You blooming well do wot you're told," said the intruder. "And don't you start calling me names. I shan't miss you next time. See?"

I saw only too well that that unlucky wager had landed me for the third time that night in a hideous misunderstanding, and that on this occasion it had nearly cost me my life. But what could I do, except continue to stand there on my aching leg, with my arms becoming stiffer and more uncomfortable every second?

Meanwhile, in the burglar's countenance there appeared a convulsive spasm, which seemed to register the birth of a fresh thought.

"Look 'ere," he said, again taking a step towards me. "'Oo told you as I was called 'John', eh?"

I tried to laugh.

"Nobody," I said. "At least, it's no use trying to explain. You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"No," said the burglar, with the utmost vehemence. "I would *not*. And do you know why, mister blinking boiled shirt? Cos, if you arst me, you ain't got no more business in this flat than wot I 'aven't. Tried to kid me I'd come to the wrong address, did yer? D'yer think I don't see your little game?"

I could only gape at these mysterious suggestions.

"Ho, yuss," added the burglar, his eyes now rolling with fury and the muzzle of his automatic wobbling wildly all over my person. "D'yer think I'm such a mug I don't see wot you're after? Why, you ruddy swell, I 'eard that limp of

yours the minute you come inside the door. Gentleman Jenkins of Portland Gaol, that's your number. But I'll learn yer to come 'ere, doing an honest cove out of a job. Them Wokingham sparklers is mine, d'yer see? And when I've got 'em, I'm going to leave you 'ere for the cops. Nah then, wot abaht it?"

"I assure you——" I began, expostulating, and at these words the telephone-bell started ringing again. Without thinking, I made a movement towards it, but I was stopped at once by a yell of rage.

"None of that," barked my visitor. "You stay where you are. I'll attend to this for yer." And still covering me with his pistol, he crossed to my writing-table and lifted the receiver from the instrument.

"'Ullo," he said; and the next moment he had dropped the receiver like a hot coal, and clapped his hand over the mouthpiece.

"'Ere; wot's the game?" he asked, a look of terror spreading over his really uncommonly dirty face.

"Game?" I repeated, completely mystified.

"'Ere's Vine Street on the line," he croaked. "Asking for a Mr. Gibson. Is this another of your little tricks, or wot is it?"

"Vine Street!" I gasped. This was the last straw. By some appalling and inexplicable accident my identity must have been discovered by one of those two police-officers, and if ever I escaped from the present horrible situation I saw that it would only be to find myself in the dock—charged with heaven alone knew what. Forgetting everything else, I dashed towards the telephone.

"Let me speak to them," I shouted.

"It's a plant!" shrieked the burglar. "Keep back, you fool, or, by gum, I'll——"

Crack! went the pistol again, but without waiting to see if I were dead or alive, I flung myself on to him. There was a brief but violent struggle, another explosion from the automatic, a reeking, stifling smell of gunpowder and whisky, and then with a sudden, sickening vision of a million brightly coloured stars the whole world went roaring away from me into a black mist.

When I came to myself (Gibson proceeded), after pausing

for a moment to let the effect of this brilliant piece of description sink in), I found that I was lying in my bed. I was aching all over in every portion of my body, but nowhere more violently than in my head, which, as I could tell without attempting the impossible feat of moving my hands, was heavily bandaged. Presently there was a sound of the door opening, and the service-valet came in.

"Pull down the blind, for heaven's sake," I groaned. "And tell me, how many bullet holes have I got in me?"

"None, sir," said the valet. "Only that crack on the head, sir. And the doctor says you'll soon get over that. I'm afraid he got right away though, sir."

"The doctor, do you mean?" I asked wearily.

"No, sir. The burglar. But I can't find as he's taken anything. Only smashed up your sitting-room a bit. Would you like some breakfast, sir?"

"No," I said, shuddering.

The vision of the valet faded away, and I passed off into an uncomfortable mixture of sleep and unconsciousness, with an intermittent nightmare of police and handcuffs. After what might have been minutes or months—I had no idea which—I heard the door opening again.

"Get out," I said.

"I say," answered a voice, "I'm awfully sorry about this, old chap, I——"

I opened my eyes. For a moment I thought I was seeing my own ghost. A figure with its arm in a sling and its face heavily decorated with sticking plaster was standing at the foot of the bed. Then I suddenly recognized it.

"Well," I said, "I can't say that in the circumstances I think your disguise is in very good taste. But you've lost your bet, old man. I know who you are perfectly well."

"Bet!" shouted John Freemantle, while a sharp stab of agony made me gasp for breath. "I've come to tell you that infernal bet is off. I wish to heaven I'd never been such a thundering ass as to take it on."

"What?" I exclaimed, trying to sit up, and falling back with another groan. "Well, you don't wish it any more than I do. But what's made you change your mind?"

"I thought it would be a jolly good idea," said John, "to dress up as a woman and come round here last night and see if you'd let me into the flat."

"Did you?" I asked, shutting my eyes again.

"Yes," said John Freemantle. "I borrowed some things from a girl I met at the Savoy, and I had a wig that I'd bought when I played Mercutio at Blackpool. Bobbed hair, you know. I dare say it would have been all right if I'd come round in a cab; but like a silly idiot I thought it would be fun to walk. I only got half-way up the Haymarket when I saw that I was being followed by a policeman. I tried to dodge him, but it was no use. Then I got the wind up and started to run, but with those infernal skirts round my legs I hadn't a dog's chance. He caught me in a blind alley off Jermyn Street, and though I put up a bit of a fight, the brute got me down with some kind of jiu-jitsu. He dragged me off to Vine Street, with a crowd of beastly people jeering at me all the way and my face bleeding like a butcher's shop where I'd hit the pavement. I did my best to explain that it was only a joke, and that I was doing it for a bet; I even got the inspector to try and ring up your flat, because I thought you might back me up or bail me out; but he couldn't get any answer."

"No," I said. "That's quite right. He couldn't."

"Well," continued John, "I spent the night in the cells, and this morning I was had up before the beak and charged with masquerading in female costume and assaulting a police-constable in the execution of his duty. I suppose I was dashed lucky to get off with a fine—the beak said I was, anyhow. And I had the sense to give them my real name, so it won't hurt me professionally if it gets in the papers. But look here, old chap," he added, "what I really came round for was to pay you that tenner. You win all right, because I'm not going on. I've had about enough of it. But if it hadn't been for that infernal policeman I'd have shown you something."

"Keep your filthy lucre," I replied. "I'm not going to make my living out of blood-money. Moreover," I added impressively, "little as you may know it, you have already shown me all and more than I could ever possibly wish to see."

And with these words I turned my face to the wall, and burst into a horrible peal of hideous laughter.

THE UNREST-CURE



“SAKI”

HECTOR MUNRO was a prolific contributor to many papers of humorous sketches under the signature of "SAKI", and his brilliant work, according to one critic, contained elements of the child, the buffoon, the satirist, the eclectic, the aristocrat and the elegant man of the world."

THE UNREST-CURE

ON the rack in the railway carriage immediately opposite Clovis was a solidly wrought travelling-bag, with a carefully written label, on which was inscribed, "J. P. Huddle, The Warren, Tilfield, near Slowborough". Immediately below the rack sat the human embodiment of the label, a solid, sedate individual, sedately dressed, sedately conversational. Even without his conversation (which was addressed to a friend seated by his side, and touched chiefly on such topics as the backwardness of Roman hyacinths and the prevalence of measles at the Rectory), one could have gauged fairly accurately the temperament and mental outlook of the travelling-bag's owner. But he seemed unwilling to leave anything to the imagination of a casual observer, and his talk grew presently personal and introspective.

"I don't know how it is," he told his friend, "I'm not much over forty, but I seem to have settled down into a deep groove of elderly middle-age. My sister shows the same tendency. We like everything to be exactly in its accustomed place; we like things to happen exactly at their appointed times; we like everything to be usual, orderly, punctual, methodical, to a hair's breadth, to a minute. It distresses and upsets us if it is not so. For instance, to take a very trifling matter, a thrush has built its nest year after year in the catkin tree on the lawn; this year, for no obvious reason, it is building in the ivy on the garden wall. We have said very little about it, but I think we both feel that the change is unnecessary, and just a little irritating."

"Perhaps," said the friend, "it is a different thrush."

"We have suspected that," said J. P. Huddle, "and I think it gives us even more cause for annoyance. We don't feel that we want a change of thrush at our time of life; and yet, as I have said, we have scarcely reached an age when these things should make themselves seriously felt."

"What you want," said the friend, "is an Unrest-cure."

"An Unrest-cure? I've never heard of such a thing."

"You've heard of Rest-cures for people who've broken down under stress of too much worry and strenuous living; well, you're suffering from overmuch repose and placidity, and you need the opposite kind of treatment."

"But where would one go for such a thing?"

"Well, you might stand as an Orange candidate for Kilkenny, or do a course of district-visiting in one of the Apache quarters of Paris, or give lectures in Berlin to prove that most of Wagner's music was written by Gambetta; and there's always the interior of Morocco to travel in. But, to be really effective, the Unrest-cure ought to be tried in the home. How you would do it I haven't the faintest idea."

It was at this point in the conversation that Clovis became galvanized into alert attention. After all, his two days' visit to an elderly relative at Slowborough did not promise much excitement. Before the train had stopped he had decorated his sinister shirt-cuff with the inscription, "J. P. Huddle, The Warren, Tilfield, near Slowborough".

Two mornings later Mr. Huddle broke in on his sister's privacy as she sat reading *Country Life* in the morning-room. It was her day and hour and place for reading *Country Life*, and the intrusion was absolutely irregular; but he bore in his hand a telegram, and in that household telegrams were recognized as happening by the hand of God. This particular telegram partook of the nature of a thunderbolt.

Bishop examining confirmation class in neighbourhood unable stay Rectory on account measles invokes your hospitality sending secretary arrange

"I scarcely know the Bishop; I've only spoken to him once!" exclaimed J. P. Huddle, with the exculpating air of one who realizes too late the indiscretion of speaking to strange bishops. Miss Huddle was the first to rally; she disliked thunderbolts as fervently as her brother did, but the womanly instinct in her told her that thunderbolts must be fed.

"We can curry the cold duck," she said. It was not the appointed day for curry, but the little orange envelope involved

a certain departure from rule and custom. Her brother said nothing, but his eyes thanked her for being brave.

"A young gentleman to see you," announced the parlour-maid.

"The secretary!" murmured the Huddles in unison; they instantly stiffened into a demeanour which proclaimed that, though they held all strangers to be guilty, they were willing to hear anything they might have to say in their defence. The young gentleman, who came into the room with a certain elegant haughtiness, was not at all Huddle's idea of a bishop's secretary; he had not supposed that the episcopal establishment could have afforded such an expensively upholstered article when there were so many other claims on its resources. The face was fleetingly familiar; if he had bestowed more attention on the fellow-traveller sitting opposite him in the railway carriage two days before he might have recognized Clovis in his present visitor.

"You are the Bishop's secretary?" asked Huddle, becoming consciously deferential.

"His confidential secretary," answered Clovis. "You may call me Stanislaus; my other name doesn't matter. The Bishop and Colonel Alberti may be here to lunch. I shall be here in any case."

It sounded rather like the programme of a royal visit.

"The Bishop is examining a confirmation class in the neighbourhood, isn't he?" asked Miss Huddle.

"Ostensibly," was the dark reply, followed by a request for a large-scale map of the locality.

Clovis was still immersed in a seemingly profound study of the map when another telegram arrived. It was addressed to "Prince Stanislaus, care of Huddle, The Warren", etc. Clovis glanced at the contents and announced: "The Bishop and Alberti won't be here till late in the afternoon." Then he returned to his scrutiny of the map.

The luncheon was not a very festive function. The princely secretary ate and drank with fair appetite, but severely discouraged conversation. At the finish of the meal he broke suddenly into a radiant smile, thanked his hostess for a charming repast, and kissed her hand with deferential rapture. Miss Huddle was unable to decide in her mind whether the action savoured of Louis Quatorzian courtliness or the reprehensible Roman attitude towards the Sabine women.

It was not her day for having a headache, but she felt that the circumstances excused her, and retired to her room to have as much headache as was possible before the Bishop's arrival. Clovis, having asked the way to the nearest telegraph office, disappeared presently down the carriage drive. Mr. Huddle met him in the hall some two hours later, and asked when the Bishop would arrive.

"He is in the library with Alberti," was the reply.

"But why wasn't I told? I never knew he had come!" exclaimed Huddle.

"No one knows he is here," said Clovis; "the quieter we can keep matters the better. And on no account disturb him in the library. Those are his orders."

"But what is all this mystery about? And who is Alberti? And isn't the Bishop going to have tea?"

"The Bishop is out for blood, not tea."

"Blood!" gasped Huddle, who did not find that the thunderbolt improved on acquaintance.

"Tonight is going to be a great night in the history of Christendom," said Clovis. "We are going to massacre every Jew in the neighbourhood."

"To massacre the Jews!" said Huddle indignantly. "Do you mean to tell me there's a general rising against them?"

"No, it's the Bishop's own idea. He's in there arranging all the details now."

"But—the Bishop is such a tolerant, humane man."

"That is precisely what will heighten the effect of his action. The sensation will be enormous."

That at least Huddle could believe.

"He will be hanged!" he exclaimed with conviction.

"A motor is waiting to carry him to the coast, where a steam-yacht is in readiness."

"But there aren't thirty Jews in the whole neighbourhood," protested Huddle, whose brain, under the repeated shocks of the day, was operating with the uncertainty of a telegraph wire during earthquake disturbances.

"We have twenty-six on our list," said Clovis, referring to a bundle of notes. "We shall be able to deal with them all the more thoroughly."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are meditating violence against a man like Sir León Birberry?" stammered Huddle. "He's one of the most respected men in the country."

"He's down on our list," said Clovis carelessly. "After all, we've got men we can trust to do our job, so we shan't have to rely on local assistance. And we've got some Boy Scouts helping us as auxiliaries."

"Boy Scouts!"

"Yes; when they understood there was real killing to be done they were even keener than the men."

"This thing will be a blot on the twentieth century!"

"And your house will be the blotting-pad. Have you realized that half the papers of Europe and the United States will publish pictures of it? By the way, I've sent some photographs of you and your sister, that I found in the library, to the *Matin* and *Die Woche*; I hope you don't mind. Also a sketch of the staircase; most of the killing will probably be done on the staircase."

The emotions that were surging in J. P. Huddle's brain were almost too intense to be disclosed in speech, but he managed to gasp out: "There aren't any Jews in this house."

"Not at present," said Clovis.

"I shall go to the police," shouted Huddle with sudden energy.

"In the shrubbery," said Clovis, "are posted ten men, who have orders to fire on anyone who leaves the house without my signal of permission. Another armed picquet is in ambush near the front gate. The Boy Scouts watch the back premises."

At this moment the cheerful hoot of a motor-horn was heard from the drive. Huddle rushed to the hall door with the feeling of a man half-awakened from a nightmare, and beheld Sir Leon Birberry, who had driven himself over in his car. "I got your telegram," he said. "What's up?"

"Telegram? It seemed to be a day of telegrams."

Come here at once. Urgent. James Huddle, was the purport of the message displayed before Huddle's bewildered eyes.

"I see it all!" he exclaimed suddenly in a voice shaken with agitation, and with a look of agony in the direction of the shrubbery he hauled the astonished Birberry into the house. Tea had just been laid in the hall, but the now thoroughly panic-stricken Huddle dragged his protesting guest upstairs, and in a few minutes' time the entire household had been

summoned to that region of momentary safety. Clovis alone graced the tea-table with his presence ; the fanatics in the library were evidently too immersed in their monstrous machinations to dally with the solace of teacup and hot toast. Once the youth rose, in answer to the summons of the front-door bell, and admitted Mr. Paul Isaacs, shoemaker and parish councillor, who had also received a pressing invitation to The Warren. With an atrocious assumption of courtesy, which a Borgia could hardly have outdone, the secretary escorted this new captive of his net to the head of the stairway, where his involuntary host awaited him.

And then ensued a long, ghastly vigil of watching and waiting. Once or twice Clovis left the house to stroll across to the shrubbery, returning always to the library, for the purpose evidently of making a brief report. Once he took in the letters from the evening postman, and brought them to the top of the stairs with punctilious politeness. After his next absence he came half-way up the stairs to make an announcement.

"The Boy Scouts mistook my signal, and have killed the postman. I've had very little practice in this sort of thing, you see. Another time I shall do better."

The housemaid, who was engaged to be married to the evening postman, gave way to clamorous grief.

"Remember that your mistress has a headache," said J. P. Huddle. (Miss Huddle's headache was worse.)

Clovis hastened downstairs, and after a short visit to the library returned with another message :

"The Bishop is sorry to hear that Miss Huddle has a headache. He is issuing orders that as far as possible no firearms shall be used near the house ; any killing that is necessary on the premises will be done with cold steel. The Bishop does not see why a man should not be a gentleman as well as a Christian."

That was the last they saw of Clovis ; it was nearly seven o'clock, and his elderly relative liked him to dress for dinner. But, though he had left them for ever, the lurking suggestion of his presence haunted the lower regions of the house during the long hours of the wakeful night, and every creak of the stairway, every rustle of wind through the shrubbery, was fraught with horrible meaning. At about seven next morning the gardener's boy and the early postman finlay

convinced the watchers that the Twentieth Century was still unblotted.

"I don't suppose," mused Clovis, as an early train bore him townwards, "that they will be in the least grateful for the Unrest-cure."

ESMÉ

"ALL hunting stories are the same," said Clovis ; "just as all Turf stories are the same, and all——"

"My hunting story isn't a bit like any you've ever heard," said the Baroness. "It happened quite a while ago, when I was about twenty-three. I wasn't living apart from my husband then ; you see, neither of us could afford to make the other a separate allowance. In spite of everything that proverbs may say, poverty keeps together more homes than it breaks up. But we always hunted with different packs. All this has nothing to do with the story."

"We haven't arrived at the meet yet. I suppose there was a meet," said Clovis.

"Of course there was a meet," said the Baroness ; "all the usual crowd were there, especially Constance Broddle. Constance is one of those strapping florid girls that go so well with autumn scenery or Christmas decorations in church. 'I feel a presentiment that something dreadful is going to happen,' she said to me. 'Am I looking pale?'"

"She was looking about as pale as a beetroot that has suddenly heard bad news.

"'You're looking nicer than usual,' I said, 'but that's so easy for you.' Before she had got the right bearings of this remark we had settled down to business ; hounds had found a fox lying out in some gorse-bushes."

"I knew it," said Clovis ; "in every fox-hunting story that I've ever heard there's been a fox and some gorse-bushes."

"Constance and I were well mounted," continued the Baroness serenely, "and we had no difficulty in keeping ourselves in the first flight, though it was a fairly stiff run. Towards the finish, however, we must have held rather too independent a line, for we lost the hounds, and found ourselves plodding aimlessly along miles away from anywhere. It was fairly exasperating, and my temper was beginning to

let itself go by inches, when on pushing our way through an accommodating hedge we were gladdened by the sight of hounds in full cry in a hollow just beneath us.

" 'There they go,' cried Constance, and then added in a gasp, 'In heaven's name, what are they hunting?'

"It was certainly no mortal fox. It stood more than twice as high, had a short, ugly head and an enormous thick neck.

" 'It's a hyena,' I cried; 'it must have escaped from Lord Pabham's Park.'

"At that moment the hunted beast turned and faced its pursuers, and the hounds (there were only about six couple of them) stood round in a half-circle and looked foolish. Evidently they had broken away from the rest of the pack on the trail of this alien scent, and were not quite sure how to treat their quarry now they had got him.

"The hyena hailed our approach with unmistakable relief and demonstrations of friendliness. It had probably been accustomed to uniform kindness from humans, while its first experience of a pack of hounds had left a bad impression. The hounds looked more than ever embarrassed as their quarry paraded its sudden intimacy with us, and the faint toot of a horn in the distance was seized on as a welcome signal for unobtrusive departure. Constance and I and the hyena were left alone in the gathering twilight.

" 'What are we to do?' asked Constance.

" 'What a person you are for questions!' I said.

" 'Well, we can't stay here all night with a hyena,' she retorted.

" 'I don't know what your ideas of comfort are,' I said; 'but I shouldn't think of staying here all night even without a hyena. My home may be an unhappy one, but at least it has hot and cold water laid on, and domestic service, and other conveniences which we shouldn't find here. We had better make for that ridge of trees to the right; I imagine the Crowley road is just beyond.'

"We trotted off slowly along a faintly marked cart-track, with the beast following cheerfully at our heels.

" 'What on earth are we to do with the hyena?' came the inevitable question.

" 'What does one generally do with hyenas?' I asked crossly.

" 'I've never had anything to do with one before,' said Constance.

" 'Well, neither have I. If we even knew its sex we might give it a name. Perhaps we might call it Esmé. That would do in either case.'

"There was still sufficient daylight for us to distinguish wayside objects, and our listless spirits gave an upward perk as we came upon a small, half-naked gipsy brat picking blackberries from a low-growing bush. The sudden apparition of two horsewomen and a hyena set it off crying, and in any case we should scarcely have gleaned any useful geographical information from that source; but there was a probability that we might strike a gipsy encampment somewhere along our route. We rode on hopefully but uneventfully for another mile or so.

" 'I wonder what that child was doing there,' said Constance presently.

" 'Picking blackberries. Obviously.'

" 'I don't like the way it cried,' pursued Constance; 'somehow its wail keeps ringing in my ears.'

"I did not chide Constance for her morbid fancies; as a matter of fact the same sensation, of being pursued by a persistent fretful wail, had been forcing itself on my rather over-tired nerves. For company's sake I hulloed to Esmé, who had lagged somewhat behind. With a few springy bounds he drew up level, and then shot past us.

"The wailing accompaniment was explained. The gipsy child was firmly, and I expect painfully, held in his jaws.

" 'Merciful heaven !' screamed Constance. 'What on earth shall we do ? What are we to do ?'

" 'I am perfectly certain that at the Last Judgment Constance will ask more questions than any of the examining Seraphs.

" 'Can't we do something ?' she persisted tearfully, as Esmé cantered easily along in front of our tired horses.

"Personally I was doing everything that occurred to me at the moment. I stormed and scolded and coaxed in English and French and gamekeeper language; I made absurd, ineffectual cuts in the air with my thongless hunting-crop; I hurled my sandwich-case at the brute; in fact, I really don't know what more I could have done. And still we lumbered on through the deepening dusk, with that dark, uncouth shape lumbering ahead of us, and a drone of

lugubrious music floating in our ears. Suddenly Esmé bounded aside into some thick bushes, where we could not follow; the wail rose to a shriek and then stopped altogether. This part of the story I always hurry over, because it is really rather horrible. When the beast joined us again, after an absence of a few minutes, there was an air of patient understanding about him, as though he knew that he had done something of which we disapproved, but which he felt to be thoroughly justifiable.

" 'How can you let that ravening beast trot by your side?' asked Constance. She was looking more than ever like an albino beetroot.

" 'In the first place, I can't prevent it,' I said; 'and in the second place, whatever else he may be, I doubt if he's ravening at the present moment.'

"Constance shuddered. 'Do you think the poor little thing suffered much?' came another of her futile questions.

" 'The indications were all that way,' I said; 'on the other hand, of course, it may have been crying from sheer temper. Children sometimes do.'

"It was nearly pitch-dark when we emerged suddenly into the high road. A flash of lights and the whir of a motor went past us at the same moment at uncomfortably close quarters. A thud and a sharp screeching yell followed a second later. The car drew up, and when I had ridden back to the spot I found a young man bending over a dark, motionless mass lying by the roadside.

" 'You have killed my Esmé!' I exclaimed bitterly.

" 'I'm so awfully sorry,' said the young man; 'I keep dogs myself, so I know what you must feel about it. I'll do anything I can in reparation.'

" 'Please bury him at once,' I said; 'that much I think I may ask of you.'

" 'Bring the spade, William,' he called to the chauffeur. Evidently hasty roadside interments were contingencies that had been provided against.

"The digging of a sufficiently large grave took some little time. 'I say, what a magnificent fellow!' said the motorist as the corpse was rolled over into the trench. 'I'm afraid he must have been rather a valuable animal.'

" 'He took second in the puppy class at Birmingham last year,' I said resolutely.

"Constance snorted loudly.

"'Don't cry, dear,' I said brokenly ; 'it was all over in a moment. He couldn't have suffered much.'

"'Look here,' said the young fellow desperately, 'you simply must let me do something by way of reparation.'

"I refused sweetly, but as he persisted I let him have my address.

"Of course, we kept our own counsel as to the earlier episodes of the evening. Lord Pabham never advertised the loss of his hyena ; when a strictly fruit-eating animal strayed from his park a year or two previously he was called upon to give compensation in eleven cases of sheep-worrying and practically to restock his neighbours' poultry yards, and an escaped hyena would have mounted up to something on the scale of a Government grant. The gipsies were equally unobtrusive over their missing offspring ; I don't suppose in large encampments they really know to a child or two how many they've got."

The Baroness paused reflectively, and then continued :

"There was a sequel to the adventure, though. I got through the post a charming little diamond brooch, with the name Esmé set in a sprig of rosemary. Incidentally, too, I lost the friendship of Constance Broddle. You see, when I sold the brooch I quite properly refused to give her any share of the proceeds. I pointed out that the Esmé part of the affair was my own invention, and the hyena part of it belonged to Lord Pabham, if it really was his hyena, of which, of course, I've no proof."

THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW



WASHINGTON IRVING

WASHINGTON IRVING was an American by birth, though he lived for many years in England, where he wrote much of his *Sketchbook*. This contains among other charming pieces the immortal tale of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Of his longer works the most popular is *The Albion*.

THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF THE LATE
DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER

A pleasing land of drowsy head it was,
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye ;
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
For ever flushing round a summer sky.
"CASTLE OF INDOLENCE."

IN the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tappan Zee, and where they always prudently shortened sail, and implored the protection of St. Nicholas when they crossed, there lies a small market-town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarry Town. This name was given, we are told, in former days, by the good housewives of the adjacent country, from the inveterate propensity of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days. Be that as it may, I do not vouch for the fact, but merely advert to it, for the sake of being precise and authentic. Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley, or rather lap of land, among high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides through it, with just murmur enough to lull one to repose ; and the occasional whistle of a quail or tapping of a woodpecker is almost the only sound that ever breaks in upon the uniform tranquillity.

I recollect that, when a stripling, my first exploit in squirrel-shooting was in a grove of tall walnut trees that shades one side of the valley. I had wandered into it at noon time, when all nature is peculiarly quiet, and was startled by the roar of my own gun, as it broke the Sabbath stillness around, and was

prolonged and reverberated by the angry echoes. If ever I should wish for a retreat, whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley.

From the listless repose of the place, and the peculiar character of its inhabitants, who are descendants from the original Dutch settlers, this sequestered glen has long been known by the name of SLEEPY HOLLOW, and its rustic lads are called the Sleepy Hollow Boys throughout all the neighbouring country. A drowsy dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere. Some say that the place was bewitched by a high German doctor during the early days of the settlement; others, that an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, held his pow-wows there before the country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson. Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie. They are given to all kinds of marvellous beliefs; are subject to trances and visions; and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighbourhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions; stars shoot and meteors glare oftener across the valley than in any other part of the country, and the nightmare, with her whole nine fold, seems to make it the favourite scene of her gambols.

The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, and seems to be commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air, is the apparition of a figure on horseback without a head. It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon-ball, in some nameless battle during the revolutionary war; and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk, hurrying along in the gloom of night, as if on the wings of the wind. His haunts are not confined to the valley, but extend at times to the adjacent roads, and especially to the vicinity of a church at no great distance. Indeed, certain of the most authentic historians of those parts, who have been careful in collecting and collating the floating facts concerning this spectre, allege that the body of the trooper, having been buried in the churchyard, the ghost rides forth to the scene of battle in nightly

quest of his head ; and that the rushing speed with which he sometimes passes along the Hollow, like a midnight blast, is owing to his being belated, and in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before daybreak.

Such is the general purport of this legendary superstition, which has furnished materials for many a wild story in that region of shadows ; and the spectre is known at all the country firesides by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

It is remarkable that the visionary propensity I have mentioned is not confined to the native inhabitants of the valley, but is unconsciously imbibed by everyone who resides there for a time. However wide awake they may have been before they entered that sleepy region, they are sure, in a little time, to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to grow imaginative—to dream dreams, and see apparitions.

I mention this peaceful spot with all possible laud ; for it is in such little retired Dutch valleys, found here and there embosomed in the great state of New York, that population, manners, and customs remain fixed ; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are like those little nooks of still water which border a rapid stream ; where we may see the straw and bubble riding quietly at anchor, or slowly revolving in their mimic harbour, undisturbed by the rush of the passing current. Though many years have elapsed since I trod the drowsy shades of Sleepy Hollow, yet I question whether I should not still find the same trees and the same families vegetating in its sheltered bosom.

In this by-place of nature there abode, in a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since, a worthy wight of the name of Ichabod Crane ; who sojourned, or, as he expressed it, “tarried”, in Sleepy Hollow, for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity. He was a native of Connecticut, a state which supplied the Union with pioneers for the mind as well as for the forest, and sends forth yearly its legions of frontier woodmen and country schoolmasters. The cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels,

and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock, perched upon his spindle neck, to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.

His schoolhouse was a low building of one large room rudely constructed of logs ; the windows partly glazed, and partly patched with leaves of old copy-books. It was most ingeniously secured at vacant hours by a withe twisted in the handle of the door, and stakes set against the window-shutters ; so that, though a thief might get in with perfect ease, he would find some embarrassment in getting out ; an idea most probably borrowed by the architect, Yost Van Houten, from the mystery of an eel-pot. The schoolhouse stood in a rather lonely but pleasant situation, just at the foot of a woody hill, with a brook running close by, and a formidable birch tree growing at one end of it. From hence the low murmur of his pupils' voices, conning over their lessons, might be heard on a drowsy summer's day, like the hum of a beehive ; interrupted now and then by the authoritative voice of the master, in the tone of menace or command ; or, peradventure, by the appalling sound of the birch, as he urged some tardy loiterer along the flowery path of knowledge. Truth to say, he was a conscientious man, and ever bore in mind the golden maxim, "Spare the rod and spoil the child". Ichabod Crane's scholars certainly were not spoiled.

I would not have it imagined, however, that he was one of those cruel potentates of the school who joy in the smart of their subjects ; on the contrary, he administered justice with discrimination rather than severity ; taking the burthen off the backs of the weak and laying it on those of the strong. Your mere puny stripling, that winced at the least flourish of the rod, was passed by with indulgence ; but the claims of justice were satisfied by inflicting a double portion on some little tough, wrong-headed, broad-skirted Dutch urchin, who sulked and swelled and grew dogged and sullen beneath the birch. All this he called "doing his duty by their parents" ; and he never inflicted a chastisement without following it by

the assurance, so consolatory to the smarting urchin, that "he would remember it and thank him for it the longest day he had to live".

When school-hours were over, he was even the companion and playmate of the larger boys ; and on holiday afternoons would convoy some of the smaller ones home, who happened to have pretty sisters, or good housewives for mothers, noted for the comforts of the cupboard. Indeed, it behoved him to keep on good terms with his pupils. The revenue arising from his school was small, and would have been scarcely sufficient to furnish him with daily bread, for he was a huge feeder, and, though lank, had the dilating powers of an anaconda ; but to help out his maintenance, he was, according to country custom in those parts, boarded and lodged at the houses of the farmers, whose children he instructed. With these he lived successively a week at a time ; thus going the rounds of the neighbourhood, with all his worldly effects tied up in a cotton handkerchief.

That all this might not be too onerous on the purses of his rustic patrons, who are apt to consider the costs of schooling a grievous burden, and schoolmasters as mere drones, he had various ways of rendering himself both useful and agreeable. He assisted the farmers occasionally in the lighter labours of their farms ; helped to make hay ; mended the fences ; took the horses to water ; drove the cows from pasture ; and cut wood for the winter fire. He laid aside, too, all the dominant dignity and absolute sway with which he lorded it in his little empire, the school, and became wonderfully gentle and ingratiating. He found favour in the eyes of the mothers by petting the children, particularly the youngest ; and like the lion bold, which whilom so magnanimously the lamb did hold, he would sit with a child on one knee, and rock a cradle with his foot for whole hours together.

In addition to his other vocations, he was the singing-master of the neighbourhood, and picked up many bright shillings by instructing the young folks in psalmody. It was a matter of no little vanity to him, on Sundays, to take his station in front of the church gallery, with a band of chosen singers ; where, in his own mind, he completely carried away the palm from the parson. Certain it is, his voice resounded far above all the rest of the congregation ; and there are peculiar quavers still to be heard in that church, and which may even be heard

half a mile off, quite to the opposite side of the mill-pond, on a still Sunday morning, which are said to be legitimately descended from the nose of Ichabod Crane. Thus, by divers little makeshifts, in that ingenious way which is commonly denominated "by hook and by crook", the worthy pedagogue got on tolerably enough, and was thought, by all who understand nothing of the labour of head-work, to have a wonderfully easy life of it.

The schoolmaster is generally a man of some importance in the female circle of a rural neighbourhood ; being considered a kind of idle gentleman-like personage, of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains, and, indeed, inferior in learning only to the parson. His appearance, therefore, is apt to occasion some little stir at the tea-table of a farm-house and the addition of a supernumerary dish of cakes or sweetmeats, or peradventure the parade of a silver tea-pot. Our man of letters, therefore, was peculiarly happy in the smiles of all the country damsels. How he would figure among them in the churchyard between services on Sundays ! Gathering grapes for them from the wild vines that overran the surrounding trees ; reciting for their amusement all the epitaphs on the tombstones ; or sauntering with a whole bevy of them along the banks of the adjacent mill-pond ; while the more bashful country bumpkins hung sheepishly back, envying his superior elegance and address.

From his half itinerant life, also, he was a kind of travelling gazette, carrying the whole budget of local gossip from house to house ; so that his appearance was always greeted with satisfaction. He was, moreover, esteemed by the women as a man of great erudition, for he had read several books quite through, and was a perfect master of Cotton Mather's *History of New England Witchcraft*, in which, by the way, he most firmly and potently believed.

He was, in fact, an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple credulity. His appetite for the marvellous, and his powers of digesting it, were equally extraordinary ; and both had been increased by his residence in this spell-bound region. No tale was too gross or monstrous for his capacious swallow. It was often his delight, after his school was dismissed in the afternoon, to stretch himself on the rich bed of clover bordering the little brook that whimpered by his schoolhouse, and there con over old Mather's direful tales, until the gathering

dusk of the evening made the printed page a mere mist before his eyes. Then, as he wended his way by swamp and stream and awful woodland, to the farm-house where he happened to be quartered, every sound of nature, at that witching hour, fluttered his excited imagination : the moan of the whip-poor-will¹ from the hill-side ; the boding cry of the tree-toad, that harbinger of storm ; the dreary hooting of the screech-owl, or the sudden rustling in the thicket of birds frightened from their roost. The fire-flies, too, which sparkled most vividly in the darkest places, now and then startled him, as one of uncommon brightness would stream across his path ; and if by chance a huge blackhead of a beetle came winging his blundering fight against him, the poor varlet was ready to give up the ghost, with the idea that he was struck with a witch's token. His only resource on such occasions, either to drown thought or drive away evil spirits, was to sing psalm tunes ; and the good people of Sleepy Hollow, as they sat by their doors of an evening, were often filled with awe at hearing his nasal melody, "in linked sweetness long drawn out", floating from the distant hill, or along the dusky road.

Another of his sources of fearful pleasure was to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning by the fire, with a row of apples roasting and spluttering along the hearth, and listen to their marvellous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted fields, and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses, and particularly of the headless horseman, or Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him. He would delight them equally by his anecdotes of witchcraft, and of the direful omens and portentous sights and sounds in the air, which prevailed in the earlier times of Connecticut ; and would frighten them woefully with speculations upon comets and shooting stars ; and with the alarming fact that the world did absolutely turn round, and that they were half the time topsy-turvy !

But if there was a pleasure in all this, while snugly cuddling in the chimney-corner of a chamber that was all of a ruddy glow from the crackling wood fire, and where, of course, no spectre dared to show its face, it was dearly purchased by the terrors of his subsequent walk homewards. What fearful shapes and shadows beset his path amidst the dim and ghastly

¹ The whip-poor-will is a bird which is only heard at night. It receives its name from its note, which is thought to resemble those words.

glare of a snowy night ! With what wistful look did he eye every trembling ray of light streaming across the waste fields from some distant window ! How often was he appalled by some shrub covered with snow, which, like a sheeted spectre, beset his very path ! How often did he shrink with curdling awe at the sound of his own steps on the frosty crust beneath his feet—and dread to look over his shoulder, lest he should behold some uncouth being tramping close behind him ! And how often was he thrown into complete dismay by some rushing blast, howling among the trees, in the idea that it was the Galloping Hessian on one of his nightly scourings !

All these, however, were mere terrors of the night, phantoms of the mind that walk in darkness ; and though he had seen many spectres in his time, and been more than once beset by Satan in divers shapes, in his lonely perambulations, yet daylight put an end to all these evils ; and he would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman.

Among the musical disciples who assembled one evening in each week to receive his instructions in psalmody was Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a substantial Dutch farmer. She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen ; plump as a partridge ; ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches, and universally famed, not merely for her beauty, but her vast expectations. She was, withal, a little of a coquette, as might be perceived even in her dress, which was a mixture of ancient and modern fashions, as most suited to set off her charms. She wore the ornaments of pure yellow gold which her great-great-grandmother had brought over from Saardam ; the tempting stomacher of the olden time ; and withal a provokingly short petticoat, to display the prettiest foot and ankle in the country round.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart towards the sex, and it is not to be wondered at that so tempting a morsel soon found favour in his eyes, more especially after he had visited her in her paternal mansion. Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. He seldom, it is true, sent either his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm ; but within those, everything was snug, happy, and well-conditioned. He was

satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it ; and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style, in which he lived. His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks, in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. A great elm tree spread its broad branches over it, at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the softest and sweetest water, in a little well formed of a barrel, and then stole sparkling away through the grass to a neighbouring brook that bubbled along among alders and dwarf willows.

Hard by the farm-house was a vast barn that might have served for a church, every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm ; the flail was busily resounding within it from morning to night ; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves ; and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof.

Sleek unwieldy porkers were grunting in the repose and abundance of their pens, whence sallied forth now and then troops of sucking-pigs, as if to snuff the air. A stately squadron of snowy geese were riding in an adjoining pond, convoying whole fleets of ducks ; regiments of turkeys were gobbling through the farm-yard, and guinea-fowls fretting about it, like the ill-tempered housewives, with their peevish, discontented cry. Before the barn door strutted the gallant cock, that pattern of a husband, a warrior, and a fine gentleman, clapping his burnished wings, and crowing in the pride and gladness of his heart—sometimes tearing up the earth with his feet, and then generously calling his ever-hungry family of wives and children to enjoy the rich morsel which he had discovered.

The pedagogue's mouth watered as he looked upon his sumptuous promise of luxurious winter fare. In his devouring mind's eye he pictured to himself every roasting-pig running about with a pudding in his belly, and an apple in his mouth ; the pigeons were snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie, and tucked in with a coverlet of crust ; the geese were swimming in their own gravy ; and the ducks pairing cosily in dishes, like snug married couples, with a decent competency of onion

sauce. In the porkers he saw carved out the future sleek side of bacon and juicy relishing ham ; not a turkey but he beheld daintily trussed-up, with its gizzard under its wing, and, peradventure, a necklace of savoury sausages ; and even bright chanticleer himself lay sprawling on his back in a side dish, with uplifted claws, as if craving that quarter which his chivalrous spirit disdained to ask while living.

As the enraptured Ichabod fancied all this, and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow-lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burthened with ruddy fruit, which surrounded the warm tenement of Van Tassel, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness. Nay, his busy fancy already realized his hopes, and presented to him the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a waggon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangling beneath ; and he beheld himself bestriding a pacing mare, with a colt at her heels, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee, or the Lord knows where.

When he entered the house, the conquest of his heart was complete. It was one of those spacious farm-houses, with high-ridged, but lowly-sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers ; the low projecting eaves forming a piazza along the front, capable of being closed up in bad weather. Under this were hung flails, harness, various utensils of husbandry, and nets for fishing in the neighbouring river. Benches were built along the sides for summer use ; and a great spinning-wheel at one end, and a churn at the other, showed the various uses to which this important porch might be devoted.

From this piazza the wondering Ichabod entered the hall, which formed the centre of the mansion and the place of usual residence. Here rows of resplendent pewter, ranged on a long dresser, dazzled his eyes. In one corner stood a huge bag of wool ready to be spun ; in another, a quantity of linsey-woolsey just from the loom ; ears of Indian corn, and strings of dried apples and peaches, hung in gay festoons along the wall, mingled with the gaud of red peppers ; and a door left ajar gave him a peep into the best parlour, where the claw-

footed chairs and dark mahogany tables shone like mirrors ; and irons, with their accompanying shovel and tongs, glistened from their covert of asparagus tops ; mock oranges and conch-shells decorated the mantelpiece ; strings of various coloured birds' eggs were suspended above it ; a great ostrich egg was hung from the centre of the room ; and a corner-cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china.

From the moment Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel. In this enterprise, however, he had more real difficulties than generally fell to the lot of a knight-errant of yore, who seldom had anything but giants, enchanters, fiery dragons, and such like easily conquered adversaries, to contend with ; and had to make his way merely through gates of iron and brass, and walls of adamant, to the castle keep, where the lady of his heart was confined ; all of which he achieved as easily as a man would carve his way to the centre of a Christmas pie, and then the lady gave him her hand as a matter of course. Ichabod, on the contrary, had to win his way to the heart of a country coquette, beset with a labyrinth of whims and caprices, which were for ever presenting new difficulties and impediments ; and he had to encounter a host of fearful adversaries of real flesh and blood, the numerous rustic admirers who beset every portal to her heart, keeping a watchful and angry eye upon each other, but ready to fly out in the common cause against any new competitor.

Among these the most formidable was a burly, roaring, roistering blade, of the name of Abraham, or, according to the Dutch abbreviation, Brom Van Brunt, the hero of the country round, which rang with his feats of strength and hardihood. He was broad-shouldered and double-jointed, with short curly black hair, and a bluff but not unpleasant countenance, having a mingled air of fun and arrogance. From his Herculean frame and great powers of limb, he had received the nickname of BROM BONES, by which he was universally known. He was famed for great knowledge and skill in horsemanship, being as dexterous on horseback as a Tartar. He was foremost at all races and cock-fights, and, with the ascendancy which bodily strength acquires in rustic life, was the umpire in all disputes, setting his hat on one side, and

giving his decisions with an air and tone admitting of no gain-say or appeal. He was always ready for either a fight or frolic, but had more mischief than ill-will in his composition ; and, with all his overbearing roughness, there was a strong dash of waggish good humour at bottom. He had three or four boon companions, who regarded him as their model, and at the head of whom he scoured the country, attending every scene of feud or merriment for miles round.

In cold weather he was distinguished by a fur cap, surmounted with a flaunting fox's tail ; and when the folks at a country gathering descried this well-known crest at a distance, whisking about among a squad of hard riders, they always stood by for a squall. Sometimes his crew would be heard dashing along past the farm-houses at midnight, with whoop and halloo, like a troop of Don Cossacks, and the old dames, startled out of their sleep, would listen for a moment, till the hurry-scurry had clattered by, and then exclaim, "Ay, there goes BROM BONES and his gang !" The neighbours looked upon him with a mixture of awe, admiration, and goodwill ; and when any madcap prank or rustic brawl occurred in the vicinity, always shook their heads and warranted Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

This rantipole hero had for some time singled out the blooming Katrina for the object of his uncouth gallantries, and though his amorous toyings were something like the gentle caresses and endearments of a bear, yet it was whispered that she did not altogether discourage his hopes. Certain it is, his advances were signals for rival candidates to retire, who felt no inclination to cross a lion in his amours ; insomuch that when his horse was seen tied to Van Tassel's paling on a Sunday night, a sure sign that his master was courting, or, as it is termed, "sparking", within, all other suitors passed by in despair, and carried the war into other quarters.

Such was the formidable rival with whom Ichabod Crane had to contend, and, considering all things, a stouter man than he would have shrank from the competition, and a wiser man would have despaired. He had, however, a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance in his nature ; he was in form and spirit like a supple-jack—yielding, but tough ; though he bent, he never broke ; and though he bowed beneath the slightest pressure, yet, the moment it was away—jerk ! he was as erect, and carried his head as high as ever.

To have taken the field openly against his rival would have been madness ; for he was not a man to be thwarted in his amours, any more than that stormy lover, Achilles. Ichabod, therefore, made his advances in a quiet and gently-insinuating manner. Under cover of his character of singing-master, he made frequent visits at the farm-house ; not that he had anything to apprehend from the meddlesome interference of parents, which is so often a stumbling-block in the path of lovers.

Balt Van Tassel was an easy, indulgent soul ; he loved his daughter better even than his pipe, and, like a reasonable man and an excellent father, let her have her way in everything. His notable little wife, too, had enough to do to attend to her housekeeping, and manage her poultry ; for, as she sagely observed, ducks and geese are foolish things, and must be looked after, but girls can take care of themselves. Thus, while the busy dame bustled about the house, or plied her spinning-wheel at one end of the piazza, honest Balt would sit smoking his evening pipe at the other, watching the achievements of a little wooden warrior, who, armed with a sword in each hand, was most valiantly fighting the wind on the pinnacle of the barn. In the meantime, Ichabod would carry on his suit with the daughter by the side of the spring under the great elm, or sauntering along in the twilight, that hour so favourable to the lover's eloquence.

I profess not to know how women's hearts are wooed and won. To me they have always been matters of riddle and admiration. Some seem to have but one vulnerable point, or door of access ; while others have a thousand avenues, and may be captured in a thousand different ways. It is a great triumph of skill to gain the former, but a still greater proof of generalship to maintain possession of the latter, for a man must battle for his fortress at every door and window. He who wins a thousand common hearts is therefore entitled to some renown ; but he who keeps undisputed sway over the heart of a coquette is indeed a hero. Certain it is, this was not the case with the redoubtable Brom Bones ; and from the moment Ichabod Crane made his advances, the interests of the former evidently declined ; his horse was no longer seen tied at the palings on Sunday nights, and a deadly feud gradually arose between him and the preceptor of Sleepy Hollow,

Brom, who had a degree of rough chivalry in his nature, would fain have carried matters to open warfare, and have settled their pretensions to the lady according to the mode of those most concise and simple reasoners, the knights-errant of yore—by single combat ; but Ichabod was too conscious of the superior might of his adversary to enter the lists against him ; he had overheard a boast of Bones, that he “would double the schoolmaster up, and lay him on a shelf of his own schoolhouse” ; and he was too wary to give him an opportunity. There was something extremely provoking in this obstinately pacific system ; it left Brom no alternative but to draw upon the funds of rustic waggery in his disposition, and to play off boorish practical jokes upon his rival.

Ichabod became the object of whimsical persecution to Bones and his gang of rough-riders. They harried his hitherto peaceful domains ; smoked out his singing-school by stopping up the chimney ; broke into the schoolhouse at night, in spite of his formidable fastenings of withe and window stakes, and turned everything topsy-turvy ; so that the poor schoolmaster began to think all the witches in the country held their meetings there. But what was still more annoying, Brom took all opportunities of turning him into ridicule in presence of his mistress, and had a scoundrel dog whom he taught to whine in the most ludicrous manner, and introduced as a rival of Ichabod’s to instruct her in psalmody.

In this way matters went on for some time, without producing any material effect on the relative situation of the contending powers. On a fine autumnal afternoon, Ichabod, in pensive mood, sat enthroned on the lofty stool whence he usually watched all the concerns of his little literary realm. In his hand he swayed a ferule, that sceptre of despotic power ; the birch of justice reposed on three nails behind the throne, a constant terror to evil-doers ; while on the desk before him might be seen sundry contraband articles and prohibited weapons, detected upon the persons of idle urchins ; such as half-munched apples, pop-guns, whirligigs, fly-cages, and whole legions of rampant little paper game-cocks.

Apparently there had been some appalling act of justice recently inflicted, for his scholars were all busily intent upon their books, or slyly whispering behind them with one eye kept upon the master ; and a kind of buzzing stillness reigned throughout the schoolroom. It was suddenly interrupted by

the appearance of a Negro in tow-cloth jacket and trousers, a round-crowned fragment of a hat, like the cap of Mercury, and mounted on the back of a ragged, wild, half-broken colt, which he managed with the rope by way of halter. He came clattering up to the school door with an invitation to Ichabod to attend a merry-making, or "quilting frolic", to be held that evening at Mynheer Van Tassel's; and having delivered his message with that air of importance and effort at fine language which a Negro is apt to display on petty embassies of the kind, he dashed over the brook, and was seen scampering away up the hollow, full of the importance and hurry of his mission.

All was now bustle and hubbub in the late quiet school-room. The scholars were hurried through their lessons without stopping at trifles; those who were nimble skipped over half with impunity, and those who were tardy had a smart application now and then in the rear, to quicken their speed or help them over a tall word. Books were flung aside without being put away on the shelves; inkstands were overturned, benches thrown down, and the whole school was turned loose an hour before the usual time, bursting forth like a legion of young imps, yelping and racketing about the green in joy at their early emancipation.

The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half hour at his toilet, brushing and furbishing up his best, and indeed his only, suit of rusty black, and arranging his locks by a bit of broken looking-glass that hung up in the schoolhouse. That he might make his appearance before his mistress in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was domiciliated, a choleric old Dutchman, of the name of Hans Van Ripper, and, thus gallantly mounted, issued forth like a knight-errant in quest of adventures. But it is meet I should, in the true spirit of romantic story, give some account of the looks and equipments of my hero and his steed. The animal he bestrode was a broken-down plough-horse that had outlived almost everything but his viciousness. He was gaunt and shagged, with a ewe neck and a head like a hammer; his rusty main and tail were tangled and knotted with burrs; one eye had lost its pupil, and was glaring and spectral; but the other had the gleam of a genuine devil in it. Still, he must have had fire and mettle in his day, if we may judge from the name he bore of Gunpowder. He had, in fact, been a favourite steed of his master's, the choleric

Van Ripper, who was a furious rider, and had infused, very probably, some of his own spirit into the animal ; for, old and broken-down as he looked, there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country.

Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle ; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers ; he carried his whip perpendicularly in his hand, like a sceptre ; and, as his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings. A small wool hat rested on the top of his nose, for so his scanty strip of forehead might be called ; and the skirts of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horse's tail. Such was the appearance of Ichabod and his steed, as they shambled out of the gate of Hans Van Ripper, and it was altogether such an apparition as is seldom to be met with in broad daylight.

It was, as I have said, a fine autumnal day, the sky was clear and serene, and nature wore that rich and golden livery which we always associate with the idea of abundance. The forests had put on their sober brown and yellow, while some trees of the tenderer kind had been nipped by the frosts into brilliant dyes of orange, purple, and scarlet. Streaming files of wild ducks began to make their appearance high in the air ; the bark of the squirrel might be heard from the groves of beech and hickory nuts, and the pensive whistle of the quail at intervals from the neighbouring stubble field.

The small birds were taking their farewell banquets. In the fullness of their revelry they fluttered, chirping and frolicking, from bush to bush and tree to tree, capricious from the very profusion and variety around them. There was the honest cock-robin, the favourite game of stripling sportsmen, with its loud, querulous note ; and the twittering blackbirds flying in sable clouds ; and the golden-winged woodpecker, with his crimson crest, his broad black gorget, and splendid plumage ; and the cedar-bird, with its red-tipped wings and yellow-tipped tail, and its little monteiro cap of feathers ; and the blue jay, that noisy coxcomb, in his gay light-blue coat and white underclothes ; screaming and chattering, nodding and bobbing and bowing, and pretending to be on good terms with every songster of the grove.

As Ichabod jogged slowly on his way, his eye, ever open to every symptom of culinary abundance, ranged with delight

over the treasures of jolly autumn. On all sides he beheld vast stores of apples ; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees ; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market ; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press. Further on he beheld great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts, and holding out the promise of cakes and hasty-pudding ; and the yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun, and giving ample prospects of the most luxurious of pies ; and anon he passed the fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odour of the beehive, and as he beheld them, soft anticipations stole over his mind of dainty slapjacks, well buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle, by the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel.

Thus feeding his mind with many sweet thoughts and "sugared suppositions", he journeyed along the sides of a range of hills which look out upon some of the goodliest scenes of the mighty Hudson. The sun gradually wheeled his broad disc down into the west. The wide bosom of the Tappan Zee lay motionless and glassy, except that here and there a gentle undulation waved and prolonged the blue shadow of the distant mountain. A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The horizon was of a fine golden tint, changing gradually into a pure apple-green, and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. A slanting ray lingered on the woody crests of the precipices that overhung some parts of the river, giving greater depth to the dark-grey and purple of their rocky sides. A sloop was loitering in the distance, dropping slowly down with the tide, her sail hanging uselessly against the mast ; and as the reflection of the sky gleamed along the still water, it seemed as if the vessel was suspended in the air.

It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the castle of the Herr Van Tassel, which he found thronged with the pride and flower of the adjacent country. Old farmers, a spare, leathern-faced race, in homespun coats and breeches, blue stockings, huge shoes, and magnificent pewter buckles. Their brisk withered little dames, in close crimped caps, long-waisted short gowns, homespun petticoats, with scissors and pin-cushions, and gay calico pockets hanging on the outside. Buxom lasses, almost as antiquated as their mothers, excepting where a straw hat, a fine riband, or perhaps a white frock gave

symptoms of city innovation. The sons, in short square skirted coats with rows of stupendous brass buttons, and their hair generally queued in the fashion of the times, especially if they could procure an eel-skin for the purpose, it being esteemed throughout the country as a potent nourisher and strengthener of the hair.

Brom Bones, however, was the hero of the scene, having come to the gathering on his favourite steed Daredevil, a creature like himself, full of mettle and mischief, and which no one but himself could manage. He was, in fact, noted for preferring vicious animals, given to all kinds of tricks, which kept the rider in constant risk of his neck, for he held a tractable, well-broken horse as unworthy of a lad of spirit.

Fain would I pause to dwell upon the world of charms that burst upon the enraptured gaze of my hero, as he entered the state parlour of Van Tassel's mansion. Not those of the bevy of buxom lasses, with their luxurious display of red and white; but the ample charms of a genuine Dutch country tea-table in the sumptuous time of autumn. Such heaped-up platters of cakes of various and almost indescribable kinds, known only to experienced Dutch housewives! There was the doughty dough-nut, the tenderer oly koek, and the crisp and crumbling cruller; sweet-cakes and short-cakes, ginger-cakes and honey-cakes, and the whole family of cakes. And then there were apple-pies and peach-pies and pumpkin-pies; besides slices of ham and smoked beef; and, moreover, delectable dishes of preserved plums, and peaches, and pears, and quinces; not to mention broiled shad and roasted chickens together with bowls of milk and cream, all mingled higgledy-piggledy, pretty much as I have enumerated them, with the motherly tea-pot sending up its clouds of vapour from the midst—Heaven bless the mark! I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves, and am too eager to get on with my story. Happily, Ichabod Crane was not in so great a hurry as his historian, but did ample justice to every dainty.

He was a kind and thankful creature, whose heart dilated in proportion as his skin was filled with good cheer; and whose spirits rose with eating as some men's do with drink. He could not help, too, rolling his large eyes round him as he ate, and chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable luxury and splendour. Then he thought how soon he'd turn his back

upon the old schoolhouse, snap his fingers in the face of Hans Van Ripper and every other niggardly patron, and kick any itinerant pedagogue out of doors that should dare to call him comrade !

Old Baltus Van Tassel moved about among his guests with a face dilated with content and good humour, round and jolly as the harvest moon. His hospitable attentions were brief, but expressive, being confined to a shake of the hand, a slap on the shoulder, a loud laugh, and a pressing invitation to "fall to, and help themselves".

And now the sound of the music from the common-room or hall summoned to the dance. The musician was an old grey-headed Negro, who had been the itinerant orchestra of the neighbourhood for more than half a century. His instrument was as old and battered as himself. The greater part of the time he scraped on two or three strings, accompanying every movement of the bow with a motion of the head ; bowing almost to the ground, and stamping with his foot whenever a fresh couple were to start.

Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing as much as upon his vocal powers. Not a limb, not a fibre about him was idle ; and to have seen his loosely-hung frame in full motion, and clattering about the room, you would have thought Saint Vitus himself, that blessed patron of the dance, was figuring before you in person. He was the admiration of all the Negroes ; who, having gathered, of all ages and sizes, from the farm and the neighbourhood, stood, forming a pyramid of shining black faces, at every door and window, gazing with delight at the scene, rolling their white eye-balls, and showing grinning rows of ivory from ear to ear. How could the flogger of urchins be otherwise than animated and joyous ? The lady of his heart was his partner in the dance, and smiling graciously in reply to all his amorous oglings ; while Brom Bones, sorely smitten with love and jealousy, sat brooding by himself in one corner.

When the dance was at an end, Ichabod was attracted to a knot of the sager folks, who, with old Van Tassel, sat smoking at one end of the piazza, gossiping over former times, and drawing out long stories about the war.

This neighbourhood, at the time of which I am speaking, was one of those highly-favoured places which abound with chronicle and great men. The British and American line had

run near it during the war ; it had, therefore, been the scene of marauding, and infested with refugees, cowboys, and all kinds of border chivalry. Just sufficient time had elapsed to enable each story-teller to dress up his tale with a little becoming fiction, and, in the indistinctness of his recollection, to make himself the hero of every exploit.

There was the story of Doffue Martling, a large blue-bearded Dutchman, who had nearly taken a British frigate with an old iron nine-pounder from a mud breastwork, only that his gun had burst at the sixth discharge. And there was an old gentleman who shall be nameless, being too rich a mynheer to be lightly mentioned, who, in the battle of Whiteplains, being an excellent master of defence, parried a musket-ball with a small sword, insomuch that he absolutely felt it whiz round the blade and glance off at the hilt ; in proof of which he was ready at any time to show the sword, with the hilt a little bent. There were several more that had been equally great in the field, not one of whom but was persuaded that he had a considerable hand in bringing the war to a happy termination.

But all these were nothing to the tales of ghosts and apparitions that succeeded. The neighbourhood is rich in legendary treasures of the kind. Local tales and superstitions thrive best in these sheltered long-settled retreats ; but are trampled under foot by the shifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places. Besides, there is no encouragement for ghosts in most of our villages, for they have scarcely had time to finish their first nap, and turn themselves in their graves, before their surviving friends have travelled away from the neighbourhood ; so that when they turn out at night to walk their rounds, they have no acquaintance left to call upon. This is perhaps the reason why we so seldom hear of ghosts except in our long-established Dutch communities.

The immediate cause, however, of the prevalence of supernatural stories in these parts was doubtless owing to the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region ; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land. Several of the Sleepy Hollow people were present at Van Tassel's, and, as usual, were doling out their wild and wonderful legends. Many dismal tales were told about funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the

great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighbourhood. Some mention was made also of the woman in white, that haunted the dark glen at Raven Rock, and was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm, having perished there in the snow. The chief part of the stories, however, turned upon the favourite spectre of Sleepy Hollow, the headless horseman, who had been heard several times of late, patrolling the country ; and, it was said, tethered his horse nightly among the graves in the churchyard.

The sequestered situation of this church seems always to have made it a favourite haunt of troubled spirits. It stands on a knoll surrounded by locust trees and lofty elms, from among which its decent whitewashed walls shine modestly forth, like Christian purity, beaming through the shades of retirement. A gentle slope descends from it to a silver sheet of water, bordered by high trees, between which peeps may be caught at the blue hills of the Hudson. To look upon its grass-grown yard, where the sunbeams seem to sleep so quietly, one would think that there at least the dead might rest in peace. On one side of the church extends a wide woody dell, along which raves a large brook among broken rocks and trunks of fallen trees. Over a deep black part of the stream, not far from the church, was formerly thrown a wooden bridge ; the road that led to it, and the bridge itself, were thickly shaded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom about it, even in the daytime ; but occasioned a fearful darkness at night. Such was one of the favourite haunts of the headless horseman, and the place where he was most frequently encountered. The tale was told of old Brouwer, a most heretical disbeliever in ghosts, how he met the horseman returning from his foray into Sleepy Hollow, and was obliged to get up behind him ; how they galloped over bush and brake, over hill and swamp, until they reached the bridge ; when the horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw old Brouwer into the brook, and sprang away over the tree-tops with a clap of thunder.

This story was immediately matched by a thrice marvellous adventure of Brom Jones, who made light of the Galloping Hessian as an arrant jockey. He affirmed that, on returning one night from the neighbouring village of Sing-Sing, he had been overtaken by this midnight trooper ; that he had offered to race with him for a bowl of punch, and should have won it

too, for Daredevil beat the goblin horse all hollow, but, just as they came to the church bridge, the Hessian bolted, and vanished in a flash of fire.

All these tales, told in that drowsy undertone with which men talk in the dark, the countenances of the listeners only now and then receiving a casual gleam from the glare of a pipe, sank deep in the mind of Ichabod. He repaid them in kind, with large extracts from his invaluable author, Cotton Mather, and added many marvellous events that had taken place in his native state of Connecticut, and fearful sights which he had seen in his nightly walks about Sleepy Hollow.

The revel now gradually broke up. The old farmers gathered together their families in their waggon, and were heard for some time rattling along the hollow roads, and over the distant hills. Some of the damsels mounted on pillions behind their favourite swains, and their light-hearted laughter, mingling with the clatter of hoofs, echoed along the silent woodlands, sounding fainter and fainter until they gradually died away—and the late scene of noise and frolic was all silent and deserted. Ichabod only lingered behind, according to the custom of country lovers, to have a *tête-à-tête* with the heiress, fully convinced that he was now on the high road to success.

What passed at this interview I will not pretend to say, for in fact I do not know. Something, however, I fear me, must have gone wrong, for he certainly sallied forth, after no very great interval, with an air quite desolate and chop-fallen. Oh these women! These women! Could that girl have been playing off any of her coquettish tricks? Was her encouragement of the poor pedagogue all a mere sham to secure her conquest of his rival? Heaven only knows, not I!

Let it suffice to say, Ichabod stole forth with the air of one who had been sacking a hen-roost, rather than a fair lady's heart. Without looking to the right or left to notice the scene of rural wealth on which he had so often gloated, he went straight to the stable, and with several hearty cuffs and kicks roused his steed most uncourteously from the comfortable quarters in which he was soundly sleeping, dreaming of mountains of corn and oats, and whole valleys of timothy and clover.

It was the very witching time of night that Ichabod, heavy-hearted and crestfallen, pursued his travels homewards, along the sides of the lofty hills which rise above Tarry Town, and

which he had traversed so cheerily in the afternoon. The hour was as dismal as himself. Far below him the Tappan Zee spread its dusky and indistinct waste of waters, with here and there the tall mast of a sloop riding quietly at anchor under the land. In the dead hush of midnight he could even hear the barking of the watch-dog from the opposite shore of the Hudson; but it was so vague and faint as only to give an idea of his distance from this faithful companion of man. Now and then, too, the long-drawn crowing of a cock, accidentally awakened, would sound far, far off, from some farmhouse away among the hills—but it was like a dreaming sound in his ear. No signs of life occurred near him, but occasionally the melancholy chirp of a cricket, or perhaps the guttural twang of a bull-frog, from a neighbouring marsh, as if sleeping uncomfortably, and turning suddenly in his bed.

All the stories of ghosts and goblins that he had heard in the afternoon now came crowding upon his recollection. The night grew darker and darker; the stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky, and driving clouds occasionally hid them from his sight. He had never felt so lonely and dismal. He was, moreover, approaching the very place where many of the scenes of the ghost stories had been laid. In the centre of the road stood an enormous tulip tree, which towered like a giant above all the other trees of the neighbourhood, and formed a kind of landmark. Its limbs were gnarled and fantastic, large enough to form trunks for ordinary trees, twisting down almost to the earth, and rising again into the air. It was connected with the tragical story of the unfortunate André, who had been taken prisoner hard by; and was universally known by the name of Major André's tree. The common people regarded it with a mixture of respect and superstition, partly out of sympathy for the fate of its ill-starred namesake and partly from the tales of strange sights and doleful lamentations told concerning it.

As Ichabod approached this fearful tree, he began to whistle; he thought his whistle was answered; it was but a blast sweeping through the dry branches. As he approached a little nearer, he thought he saw something white hanging in the midst of the tree—he paused and ceased whistling; but, on looking more narrowly, perceived that it was a place where the tree had been scathed by lightning and the white wood laid bare. Suddenly he heard a groan—his teeth chattered,

and his knees smote against the saddle ; it was but the rubbing of one huge bough upon another as they were swayed about by the breeze. He passed the tree in safety, but new perils lay before him.

About two hundred yards from the tree a small brook crossed the road, and ran into a marshy and thickly wooded glen known by the name of Wiley's Swamp. A few rough logs, laid side by side, served for a bridge over this stream. On that side of the road where the brook entered the wood, a group of oaks and chestnuts, matted thick with wild grape-vines, threw a cavernous gloom over it. To pass this bridge was the severest trial. It was at this identical spot that the unfortunate André was captured, and under the covert of those chestnuts and vines were the sturdy yeomen concealed who surprised him. This has ever since been considered a haunted stream, and fearful are the feelings of the schoolboy who has to pass it alone after dark.

As he approached the stream his heart began to thump ; he summoned up, however, all his resolution, gave his horse half a score of kicks in the ribs, and attempted to dash briskly across the bridge ; but instead of starting forward, the perverse old animal made a lateral movement, and ran broadside against the fence. Ichabod, whose fears increased with the delay, jerked the reins on the other side, and kicked lustily with the contrary foot. It was all in vain ; his steed started, it is true, but it was only to plunge to the opposite side of the road into a thicket of brambles and alder-bushes. The schoolmaster now bestowed both whip and heel upon the starveling ribs of old Gunpowder, who dashed forward, snuffling and snorting, but came to a stand just by the bridge with a suddenness that had nearly sent his rider sprawling over his head. Just at this moment a plashy tramp by the side of the bridge caught the sensitive ear of Ichabod. In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, he beheld something huge, misshapen, black and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom, like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveller.

The hair of the affrighted pedagogue rose upon his head with terror. What was to be done ? To turn and fly was now too late ; and besides, what chance was there of escaping ghost or goblin, if such it was, which could ride upon the wings of the wind ? Summoning up, therefore, a show of courage, he

demanded in stammering accents, "Who are you?" He received no reply. He repeated his demand in a still more agitated voice. Still there was no answer. Once more he cudgelled the sides of the inflexible Gunpowder, and shutting his eyes broke forth with involuntary fervour into a psalm tune. Just then the shadowy object of alarm put itself in motion, and with a scramble and a bound, stood at once in the middle of the road. Though the night was dark and dismal, yet the form of the unknown might now in some degree be ascertained. He appeared to be a horseman of large dimensions, and mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. He made no offer of molestation or sociability, but kept aloof on one side of the road, jogging along on the blind side of old Gunpowder, who had now got over his fright and waywardness.

Ichabod, who had no relish for this strange midnight companion, and bethought himself of the adventure of Brom Bones with the Galloping Hessian, now quickened his steed, in hopes of leaving him behind. The stranger, however, quickened his horse to an equal pace. Ichabod pulled up, and fell into a walk, thinking to lag behind—the other did the same. His heart began to sink within him; he endeavoured to resume his psalm tune, but his parched tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not utter a stave. There was something in the moody and dogged silence of this pertinacious companion that was mysterious and appalling. It was soon fearfully accounted for. On mounting a rising ground, which brought the figure of his fellow-traveller in relief against the sky, gigantic in height, and muffled in a cloak, Ichabod was horror-struck on perceiving that he was headless! But his horror was still more increased on observing that the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was carried before him on the pommel of the saddle. His terror rose to desperation; he rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping, by a sudden movement, to give his companion the slip—but the spectre started full jump with him. Away then they dashed through thick and thin; stones flying and sparks flashing at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head in the eagerness of his flight.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow; but Gunpowder, who seemed possessed with a

demon, instead of keeping up it, made an opposite turn, and plunged headlong down the hill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow shaded by trees for about a quarter of a mile, where it crosses the bridge famous in goblin story, and just beyond swells the green knoll on which stands the whitewashed church.

As yet the panic of the steed had given his unskilful rider an apparent advantage in the chase ; but just as he had got half-way through the hollow, the girths of the saddle gave way, and he felt it slipping from under him. He seized it by the pommel, and endeavoured to hold it firm, but in vain ; and had just time to save himself by clasping old Gunpowder round the neck when the saddle fell to the earth, and he heard it trampled under-foot by his pursuer. For a moment the terror of Hans Van Ripper's wrath passed across his mind—for it was his Sunday saddle. But this was no time for petty fears ; the goblin was hard on his haunches ; and (unskilful rider that he was !) he had much ado to maintain his seat ; sometimes slipping on one side, sometimes on the other, and sometimes jolted on the high ridge of his horse's back-bone, with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder.

An opening in the trees now cheered him with the hopes that the church bridge was at hand. The wavering reflection of a silver star in the bosom of the brook told him that he was not mistaken. He saw the walls of the church dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He recollected the place where Brom Bones' ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black steed panting and blowing close behind him ; he even fancied that he felt his hot breath. Another convulsive kick in the ribs, and old Gunpowder sprang upon the bridge ; he thundered over the resounding planks ; he gained the opposite side ; and now Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer should vanish, according to rule, in a flash of fire and brimstone. Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, and in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod endeavoured to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash—he was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle, and with the bridle under his feet, soberly cropping

the grass at his master's gate. Ichabod did not make his appearance at breakfast—dinner-hour came, but no Ichabod. The boys assembled at the schoolhouse, and strolled idly about the banks of the brook; but no schoolmaster. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel some uneasiness about the fate of poor Ichabod and his saddle. An inquiry was set on foot, and after diligent investigation they came upon his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt; the tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented in the road, and evidently at furious speed, were traced to the bridge, beyond which, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, where the water ran deep and black, was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.

The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was not to be discovered. Hans Van Ripper, as executor of his estate, examined the bundle, which contained all his worldly effects. They consisted of two shirts and a half; two stocks for the neck; a pair or two of worsted stockings; an old pair of corduroy small-clothes; a rusty razor; a book of psalm tunes, full of dog's ears; and a broken pitch-pipe. As to the books and furniture of the schoolhouse, they belonged to the community, excepting Cotton Mather's *History of Witchcraft*, a New England Almanac, and a book of dreams and fortune-telling; in which last was a sheet of foolscap much scribbled and blotted in several fruitless attempts to make a copy of verses in honour of the heiress of Van Tassel. These magic books and the poetic scrawl were forthwith consigned to the flames by Hans Van Ripper; who from that time forward determined to send his children no more to school, observing that he never knew any good come of this same reading and writing. Whatever money the schoolmaster possessed, and he had received his quarter's pay but a day or two before, he must have had about his person at the time of his disappearance.

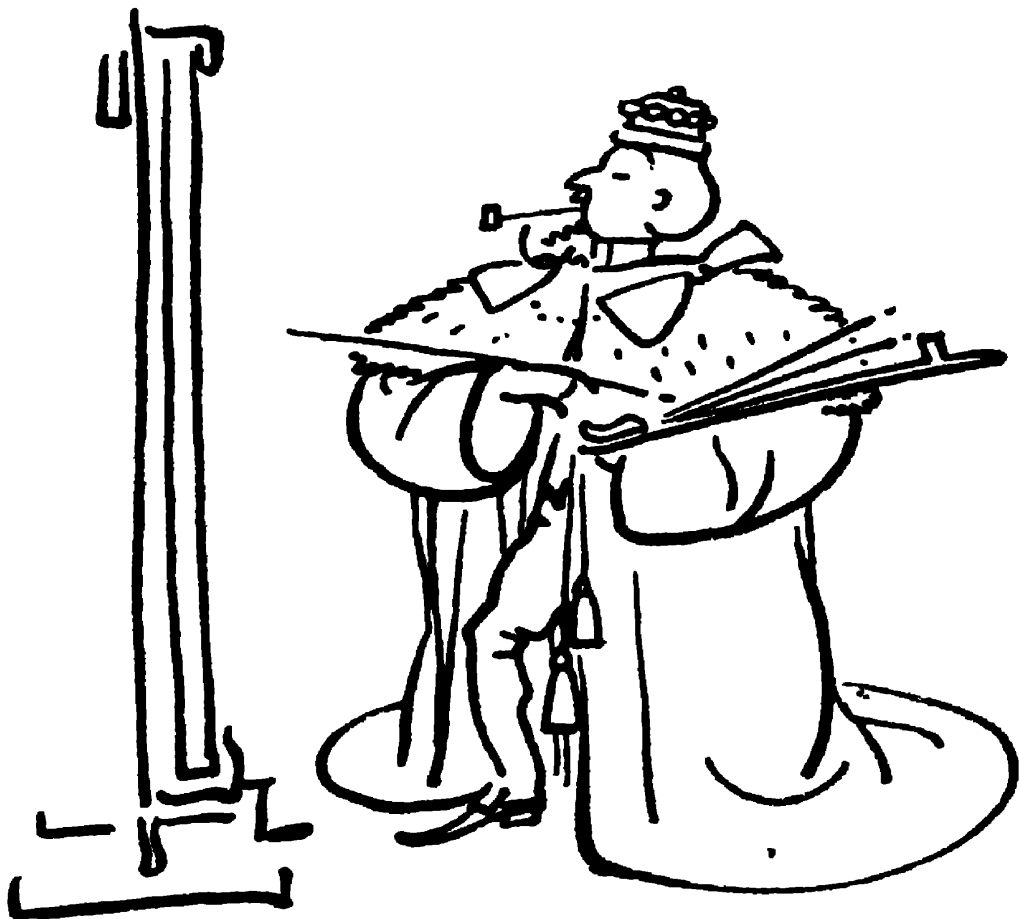
The mysterious event caused much speculation at the church on the following Sunday. Knots of gazers and gossips were collected in the churchyard, at the bridge, and at the spot where the hat and pumpkin had been found. The stories of Brouwer, of Bones, and a whole budget of others, were called to mind; and when they had diligently considered them all, and compared them with the symptoms of the present case, they shook their heads, and came to the conclusion that Ichabod

had been carried off by the Galloping Hessian. As he was a bachelor, and in nobody's debt, nobody troubled his head any more about him. The school was removed to a different quarter of the Hollow, and another pedagogue reigned in his stead.

It is true, an old farmer, who had been down to New York on a visit several years after, and from whom this account of the ghostly adventure was received, brought home the intelligence that Ichabod Crane was still alive ; that he had left the neighbourhood, partly through fear of the goblin and Hans Van Ripper, and partly in mortification at having been suddenly dismissed by the heiress ; that he had changed his quarters to a distant part of the country ; had kept school and studied law at the same time ; had been admitted to the bar, turned politician, electioneered, written for the newspapers, and finally had been made a justice of the Ten-pound Court. Brom Bones, too, who shortly after his rival's disappearance conducted the blooming Katrina in triumph to the altar, was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin ; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.

The old country wives, however, who are the best judges of these matters, maintain to this day that Ichabod was spirited away by supernatural means ; and it is a favourite story often told about the neighbourhood round the winter evening fire. The bridge became more than ever an object of superstitious awe, and that may be the reason why the road has been altered of late years, so as to approach the church by the border of the millpond. The schoolhouse being deserted, soon fell to decay, and was reported to be haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate pedagogue ; and the plough-boy, loitering homeward of a still summer evening, has often fancied his voice at a distance, chanting a melancholy psalm tune among the tranquil solitudes of Sleepy Hollow.

THE BETTER TURN



MARGERY SHARP

MARGERY SHARP was educated at Bedford College and while there went to the United States as member of an English debating team. She has published several novels and her latest, *Four Gardens*, has been recommended by the Book Society. She has also written a play entitled *Meeting at Night*, and is a well-known writer of short stories.

THE BETTER TURN

NOT all clubs are in Piccadilly; nor do all clubmen, despite a widespread tradition to the contrary, spend their days at the bridge table and their nights in silk pyjamas. Mr. Hickey, for example, drove a No. 31 bus and wore natural wool underwear; and in certain by no means exclusive circles—particularly in the neighbourhood of the Chelsea Football Ground—Mr. Hickey was a very well-known clubman indeed.

In the upstairs room at the King's Head, at the weekly meetings of the Friendly Badgers, Mr. Hickey reigned supreme. He had a turn, a flair, for the punctilio of social intercourse; nor did his appearance belie his parts. He was something like a whale and something like Queen Victoria—the very pink and pattern, in fact, of irresistible authority; and in one particular at least he also resembled the Great Macduff. However humbly placed, however near the foot of the table, Mr. Hickey's seat, by the end of a convivial evening, had always become the Chair.

He was not really the Chairman. The real Chairman was Mr. Bray, a very old ex-grocer who had been properly elected in the year 1890; only the Badgers kept no minute-books, Mr. Bray never spoke, and in the course of a decade or two the appointment had been forgotten. Too modest to blame, he was also too modest to remind, but he sometimes brooded a little. He brooded chiefly about the Treasurer, who, in 1890, had been a freshly elected stripling with a presumably good memory; but even Mr. Beagle, though still so set in his ways as to call himself a Radical, seemed to have forgotten too. This one bitterness apart, however, Mr. Bray's lot was not too unhappy, for his sheer powers of survival had at last procured him a certain respect. He commanded a seat by the fire-place, a tribute of free drinks; and Mr. Hickey, on entering, never failed to nod.

On a certain evening in July, however, the nod was so perfunctory that Mr. Bray almost took umbrage. He bridled, coughed, and cleared his throat. But Mr. Hickey did not notice, for Mr. Hickey had had an adventure.

"It was in the King's Road," began Mr. Hickey methodically, "and about the first hold-up since we left the Depôt; we'd a lorry on one side and an island on the other, and a bobby in front that had fair taken root. Nice an' peaceful it was, too, if you hadn't been going anywhere; only I happened to want to go to Camden Town. Well, just as we'd all got settled down like, I heard someone call out, and there on the island was a feller with a beard."

"A beard!" repeated Mr. Bray superciliously. "He *must* ha' been getting on."

"That's the funny part," said Mr. Hickey. "'E was quite young. Not more'n twenty or so. But 'e had a fair beard, an' a shabby old jacket, an' grey flannel bags; and, as it turned out afterwards, 'e was a lunatic!"

Mr. Hickey paused, and under cover of the ensuing sensation stole a swift and secret glance in the direction of Mr. Pye. For it was by the demeanour of Mr. Pye—a vast and somnolent Yorkshireman—that he was accustomed to measure his hold over an audience. If Pye were awake, all was well; if Pye were yawning, the story would hang fire. (When any ordinary Badger held forth, Pye simply slept.) On this particular occasion, however, Pye was not only awake, but seemed to be deliberately lending an ear.

"Jumping up and down, 'e was," continued Mr. Hickey, "like a cat on 'ot bricks. Well, I didn't take any notice, for he was just moving off again, but at the next hold-up we get stuck in, round comes my conductor to say there's a feller with a beard keeps wanting to know my name. 'E'd nipped on to the bus, d'you see, at that stop in the King's Road, and whenever my conductor tried to turn him off (for I said straight out I didn't want nothing to do with him) 'e just kept taking another pennyworth. Sevenpence 'e paid in all, which took him right to Camden Town, and the minute we got to the Depôt round he comes runnin', an' my conductor after him, and shoves his foot on the step as though 'e wanted to climb into my lap. Give me a fair turn, it did, I can tell you."

"Why, whatever did he want?" asked Mr. Bray.

With all the deliberation of one who hardly hopes to be believed, the Chairman told them.

"'E wanted," said Mr. Hickey slowly, "'e said 'e wanted to paint my picture."

From all round the table, with one spontaneous movement, a dozen heads craned suddenly forward; for even Badgers of ten years' standing, it seemed, felt an overpowering need to refresh their memories. But all was just as they remembered; the nose irregular yet commanding, the eyes small yet majestic, the mulberry of the complexion and the iron of the drooping moustache, all was familiar; and when at last the Treasurer spoke, it was for every Badger present.

"He's mad all right," said Mr. Beagle.

"That's just what my conductor said," agreed Mr. Hickey triumphantly. "'You're mad all right,' 'e said; and I said so, too. But did the young feller care? Not 'e. 'E stood there bold as an inspector and asked when was my next time off."

"Mad," said Mr. Beagle again. "They got no fear of God nor man. What did you say to that?"

The Chairman hesitated.

"Well, as a matter o' fact," he admitted at last, "I was so took aback that I went an' told him. 'Sunday afternoon,' I said. 'Splendid,' says 'e, 'there's the address. Come as early as you can and it'll be 'arf a crown an hour.' And with that 'e shoves a paper into me hand and scoots down the street."

"I be blowed!" said Mr. Bray.

It was the general opinion. Amid a sudden shuffling of beer-mugs, conversation broke loose, and for once the audacity of youth, usually the Badgers' favourite topic, received no more than passing attention. The wider field of the lunacy laws stretched temptingly before them.

"He can't be certified," laid down Mr. Bray, "or he wouldn't be out. Unless he has to report himself somewhere, o' course, the same as an alien."

"That's right," agreed the Treasurer, "or same as a ticket-o'-leave man. What did he talk like, Hickey?"

"Lahdidah, but quite civil. 'The privilege o' paintin' your portrait'—that's how 'e put it."

"You won't go, o' course," said Mr. Beagle.

Mr. Hickey stiffened. He had never, until that moment, had any intention of going; but neither had he any intention of being dictated to by his Treasurer.

"An' why not?" asked Mr. Hickey.

There was a moment's astounded silence; then with a perceptible effort the taciturn Mr. Pye suddenly found his tongue.

"They got t'strength o' ten," he proclaimed gravely. "Don't you be deceived, Hickey; whatever t'lad may look like, he'll be more'n your match."

At once other Badgers joined in, some with appropriate anecdotes, some quarrelling with Mr. Pye's figures, but all urging caution. They cast no slur, they explained, upon their Chairman's courage; they rather deplored it. They freely admitted his stamina, and paid generous tribute to his exceptional build. But the fact remained beyond all denial, that even at five to one the odds were too great to risk.

"Pack o' nonsense," said Mr. Hickey.

He emptied his mug, and, like a lion-surrounded explorer, let his indomitable gaze travel slowly over his opponents. Nor did the well-tried expedient fail of its effect; the Badgers were subdued. They recognized, by the very recklessness they sought to restrain, their natural superior. Only the Treasurer, by shifting his ground, was still able to protest.

"Anyway, you didn't ought to go alone," said Mr. Beagle.

And now with rebuke hovering on his lips, the Chairman paused. Having just demonstrated his authority, he could afford to unbend; and there was, moreover, and much as one disliked to admit it, something in what Beagle said. The strength of ten, had they? Mr. Hickey pondered the question, and came to a rapid decision. . . .

"Well, if you *want* to come, o' course," said Mr. Hickey mildly, "I dare say 'e'd be quite willin'. 'N' what about Pye? If Pye came as well, you'd have someone to talk to."

They were caught, and they knew it. They had either to follow his insane lead or stand publicly convicted of cowardice; and with the eyes of the assembly so earnestly upon them, it was scarcely a choice at all.

And so it came about that on the Sunday afternoon following, Mr. Hickey and his two chaperons stood shifting their feet outside 10 Runford Studios, in a thoroughfare off the King's Road. They had knocked once and got no answer, but at the second attempt a voice called from within demanding who they were.

"Me, Hickey," boomed back Mr. Hickey majestically.

If he had said "The Law!" it could hardly have sounded better.

"Come in, bless you!" responded the voice affably; and with some trepidation the three adventurers turned the knob, found the door opening before them, and filed cautiously through. Nor was trepidation misplaced. In the centre of the floor, prone and naked in a patch of sun, the owner of the studio lay rapidly gyrating his legs.

["What, like on bicycle?" asked Mr. Bray the next evening.

"That's it," said Mr. Hickey. "Only there wasn't a bicycle there. And if there *had* been, 'e'd ha' been upside down on it."

The Badgers gaped. . . .]

For an appalling instant the group in the doorway stood mute and motionless. It was as though they had been suddenly deprived, by some supernatural agency, of every sense but sight. Mr. Pye, indeed, by firmly screwing up his lids, negatived even that; but the eyes of Mr. Beagle, like the eyes of a prawn, seemed not only to stare, but actually to reach out beyond the limits of his head. Only in the gaze of Mr. Hickey was reason still active. He stared, indeed, but he could still observe. And his observations were of the highest importance, for they showed that the young man on the parquet, though undoubtedly insane, was also completely and patently unarmed.

The instant passed. Confidence, flowing back through Mr. Hickey's frame, communicated itself even to his companions. They breathed, they revived; and in the same moment the artist had leapt to his feet, thrown on a dressing-gown, and now presented an almost normal appearance:

"Caught in the act, what?" he exclaimed lightly. "I'll have to put the clock right."

They were not deceived. They still kept their opinion. But because a man with his boots on must always feel superior to a man in bare feet, they were a little reassured. Mr. Pye opened his eyes again, Mr. Beagle shut his, while as for Mr. Hickey, he stepped firmly forward and in unwavering tones announced that he had come.

"Grand," replied the artist cordially. "Dead on time, and the light's good. Sit anywhere you like, and I'll circle round a bit."

Glancing swiftly about the studio (to which he had hitherto paid no attention), Mr. Hickey now saw that it

was furnished, apart from artistic paraphernalia, solely with cushions. They lay heaped along the wall in a wide divan-like mass ; there was another heap by the stove and a third by the window ; but for anything at all comfortable, for anything solid even, his eye sought in vain.

"You haven't such a thing as a chair, have you ?" he asked.

The artist tore his hair.

"Now you mention it," he said, "I haven't. I never use 'em myself, and most of the models prefer cushions. Not so hard, you see. But I tell you what I *have* got—I've got a very comfortable trunk."

"Ah," said Mr. Hickey non-committally ; and the three visitors watched with interest while their host dived behind a dark-blue curtain that cut off one end of the room. It swung voluminously aside, so that they could see the further white wall and a low divan bed. A few clothes hung on pegs, one or two cushions had strayed in from the studio, but the only other furniture visible was the large leather trunk which the artist now dragged forth.

"There !" he said triumphantly. "Sit yourself down on that and you'll be right as rain."

With heroic recklessness, Mr. Hickey would at once have advanced ; but not so Mr. Beagle. He was there to protect, and he knew his duty.

"Sst !" hissed Mr. Beagle. "Ask to see what's inside."

A little superfluously—since the Treasurer hissed louder than he knew—Mr. Hickey did so. He said afterwards he felt rather a fool. What the artist felt was not observable, both surprise and chagrin (if any) being artfully concealed. With ready candour he at once threw back the lid and revealed a useful body of gentleman's underwear.

"Ah !" said Mr. Hickey again ; and this time lowered himself into position. With Mr. Pye and Mr. Beagle standing stiffly behind him he looked partly like a Lord Mayor and partly like the prisoner in the dock ; and now it was the artist's turn to ask a question.

"Will your friends be staying long ?" he inquired.

"All the time," said Mr. Hickey, motioning them forward.

"Mr. Beagle, Mr. Pye."

The Treasurer shuffled, the Yorkshireman ducked his head ; and then all three waited expectantly.

"Delighted," said the artist. "Er—my name's Laennec."

Mr. Pye looked at him.

"Laennec?" said Mr. Pye. "That's a name from my part o' t'world. L-a-e-n-n-e-c, is it?"

"That's right," said the young man hastily. "It's French, or something. Got over with the Normans. You comfortable there, Mr. Hickey?"

Mr. Pye looked again.

"Not a common name neither," he said. "There's Laennec Castle, and there's a dozen o' 'Laennec Arms'; but t'only other Laennec *we* know of is t'Duke's son."

The artist seemed to hesitate.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he said at last, "I *am* Lord Laennec. Now let's get on with it. . . ."

And it was at that precise moment, while their brains still reeled from the shock, that they all three noticed the painting. It was a large painting, nicely framed, of two black shapes and one blue shape on a light fawn ground; and on the frame beneath, alongside the show-ticket, it said: "*Moustache, sea-shell, and Marche Funèbre.*"

"The pore young feller!" sighed Mr. Bray compassionately, that evening.

"And him stark naked," finished Mr. Hickey, "in a pink silk dressing-gown." And the pause having been timed not only with a nice sense of climax, but also to allow for refreshment, he raised his mug and took a long, thoughtful pull.

Ali round the table Badgers followed his example. Their Chairman's skill as a raconteur, together with the intrinsic merit of his story, had kept them all uncommonly dry. In silence, therefore, they wetted their whistles, and only when the same again had been supplied to all was the first voice upraised in wonder.

"An' you mean to say you *stayed* there?" marvelled a Badger from Paddington.

"Stayed? O' course we stayed," said Mr. Hickey. He did not add, and neither Mr. Pye nor the Treasurer saw fit to add for him, that they had been far too much overcome to do anything else. Their knees had turned to water, and they stayed for two hours, if not exactly trembling, at least rigid in every limb; and at the end of the session, feeling as though they had done a very hard day's work, had been forced to call at the nearest public and spend most of the five shillings

on Scotch and soda. The artist, to be sure, had offered them beer, but they felt it safer to refuse.

"And what kind of a likeness did 'e get?" asked Mr. Bray curiously.

"Rotten," said the Treasurer.

From the head of the table an eye reproved him.

"'Tisn't finished, o' course," said Mr. Hickey. "'Tisn't barely started. A portrait like that takes a lot o' doing."

"You mean to say you got to go *again*?" protested Mr. Bray.

"I'm considerin' it," said Mr. Hickey. "He's mad, o' course—mad as a hatter—but from what we saw o' him today, I wouldn't say 'e was actually harmful. What d'*you* think, Beagle?"

Thus appealed to from the chair, the Treasurer paused. But the familiar and eminently safe surroundings, to say nothing of the many drinks he had been stood, were having their effect; and as once before that day, Mr. Hickey's courage proved capable of transmission.

"Well, if you *want* to go again, I'll go with you," said Mr. Beagle.

"One thing I will say for t'lad," added Mr. Pye; "while he was choosing a name, he had sense to pick a good 'un."

And then, from the bottom of the table, came a most extraordinary suggestion.

"I s'pose," hazarded a Badger timidly—a quite recently elected Badger, whom no one thought much of—"I s'pose there's no chance he *is* Lord Laennec?"

Mr. Pye snorted.

"About just as much chance as he's King of England. Why, who'd live in a barn when they could live in Laennec Castle? Next time you're up north, lad, you go and take a look at it. If you happen on a Thursday, it'll be open to t'public. That's the sort o' place Laennec is."

"I don't say he's not *mad*, Mr. Pye," protested the Badger, "but he might be a lord for all that. Lords go barmy same as you or me."

"Same as you, p'r'aps," corrected Mr. Pye. "I'm not going daft, so don't you think it. And suppose Lord Laennec did go mad—d'you think they'd have no spare room at t'Castle for him, nor a few old cushions to chuck down on t'floor?"

Amid general scorn the heretic subsided, and as the hour

was growing late the Chairman, from sheer force of habit, and in a few well-chosen words, wound up the debate with an expression of personal opinion.

"Apart from the fact that 'e's mad," he pronounced gravely, "and apart from the way 'e paints—which is all, o' course, on *account* of being mad—apart from all that, 'e's quite a nice young feller."

And in this opinion, during the next few months, both Mr. Hickey and Mr. Beagle were gradually and rather surprisingly confirmed. For the second visit—undertaken about a week later—proved so little alarming as to draw them on again; and after a third and fourth had found the artist still clothed and unmenacing, they gave rein to their natural courage and went quite often.

Their visits, moreover, were purely social, for the portrait, a failure even in the eyes of the artist, had turned into three red shapes on a plum-and-ochre ground. It was that which so upset Mr. Pye, and which eventually drove him from the studio; but Mr. Hickey and Mr. Beagle, on whom art made less impression, soon found themselves not only at ease but almost at home. They liked, without quite realizing why, the studio's empty roominess; they liked, as autumn drew on, the generous heat of the stove. Mr. Beagle in particular (his landlady being less thoroughly tamed than Mr. Hickey's) enjoyed the novel sensation of knocking out his pipe all over the floor. That they supplied their own beer was a proof no longer of suspicion, but rather of kindly thought for their host's finances.

"For if 'e's got thirty bob a week," said Mr. Hickey, "that's the last penny. 'E hasn't an overcoat, even—least, I've never seen him in one."

Mr. Beagle nodded.

"I met him t'other day in the King's Road, proper nip in the air there was. 'E'd nothing but flannels an' a jacket an' a big woolly muffler twisted round his neck."

"Here, what about bringin' in a few sausages?" suggested Mr. Hickey.

So they brought sausages along with the beer and spread many a supper on the model's throne. At first the artist demurred, but by simply ignoring his protests and getting on with the cooking Mr. Hickey and Mr. Beagle soon established their ascendancy. He fried to their orders and ate as directed.

Soon the only bar to perfect ease was the ticklish question of address, for pamper him in his follies they neither could nor would. He had, however, a Christian name as well, and by eliminating the vocative altogether and by generally referring to him as Young Arthur, they presently discovered a *modus vivendi*.

Thus things went on until the beginning of winter, when arriving one afternoon at the studio they found the throne spread with tea-things and a strange young woman manipulating the pot.

She wasn't a stranger for long. At the end of a day or two she practically lived there.

In person she was extremely attractive, having cheeks like roses, eyes like saucers, and curly butter-coloured hair; but it somehow came as a surprise when one learnt that her name was Godolphin. Possibly on that account Young Arthur addressed her as Bubbles; and after the works on which he was daily engaged, her appearance was no doubt a relief. As for Mr. Hickey, he was completely bowled over.

He did not show it, of course. He remained as aloof, majestic, and taciturn as ever. But under that calm exterior a heart began to beat, and Miss Godolphin (who could have detected a heart-beat under Mont Blanc itself) was not deceived. Almost without thinking, certainly without effort, she simply collected his scalp (and Mr. Beagle's along with it) and turned her attention back to the artist himself.

For on Young Arthur, for some inexplicable female reason, her attention seemed actually fixed. She darned his socks for him; she brought flowers for the studio. She curled on a cushion and hemmed him a tablecloth. She behaved, in short, like the traditional ray of sunlight, and in every attitude, every employment, presented such a picture of domestic bliss as would turn any man's thoughts towards matrimony.

"If I was a youngster again," remarked Mr. Beagle one day, "blowed if I wouldn't risk it."

Mr. Hickey looked at him.

"Well, and why not?" countered Mr. Beagle.

"Because she wouldn't have you, that's why not," said Mr. Hickey. "She's a lady."

Radical that he was, the Treasurer had no answer. For a lady she was indeed, and such as these degenerate times can rarely have produced. She never said "damn", but always "bother"; she never drank beer, but only tea. And she never,

except in moments of extreme emotion, employed any cosmetic in the presence of a gentleman. As far as possible, she never even mentioned them. What she did sometimes mention was the agreeable effect of brown soap and cold water ; but then they were never seen in use either.

To the charm of refinement, moreover, was added the charm of misfortune. The more she told of her history, the more touching it became. Orphaned at ten, practically destitute at sixteen, she had been forced by circumstance, and despite a strong predilection for a nursery-governess-ship, to make a career on the stage. There for two years her beauty and talent enjoyed a deserved success—and would have been enjoying it still but for the persistent malignity of a certain leading lady. Miss Godolphin named no names—she had too nice a sense of honour—but she mentioned it as a fact, and straight from the horse's mouth, that the lady in question had refused to go on unless she, Bubbles, were dismissed from the company.

"A wicked shame, that's what I call it," said Mr. Hickey. "If she hadn't had her savings, what'd have become of her then?"

And Mr. Beagle, to whom this question was frequently addressed, could only shake his head. What *would* become of her, indeed, when her savings were spent? She did not, it was true, seem to be in any immediate want, and was always dressed in the latest fashion ; but her succession of new hats merely added to Mr. Hickey's anxieties. Like many another man, he could be sentimental in particular while remaining shrewd in general ; and he had, moreover, on two separate occasions, observed Miss Godolphin alighting from an unusually large car. It dropped her in the King's Road, so that she arrived at the studio on foot ; but the car was there, nevertheless, and it did not drive off unoccupied.

"She's being led astray," thought Mr. Hickey gravely.

But how far, and how irrevocably astray, he did not realize until a week or two later, when in the course of a conversation on pinking Mr. Beagle said suddenly :

"I tell you who you *will* have her marrying, lady or no lady. You'll have her marrying Young Arthur."

Mr. Hickey looked at him contemptuously.

"Young Arthur? Not she. She's got too much sense. Besides—the lad's barmy."

"*She* doesn't think so. She's never seen him at his worst—at least I do hope she hasn't," said Mr. Beagle, remembering his own first encounter. "Besides, look at the way she mends his clothes for him! That's one o' the surest signs there is."

"Not in this case, it isn't," said Mr. Hickey stoutly. "It's just pure kindness of heart. If I thought there was anything else in it, why, I'd explain things myself; only it happens there isn't, see? Darn his socks, yes; but marry him—no."

The event, however, proved him mistaken. The very next day, over an unusually floral tea-table, Miss Godolphin and Young Arthur announced their engagement.

"*Now* what you going to do about it?" asked Mr. Beagle triumphantly.

Mr. Hickey pondered. He had no conscious desire to interfere with anybody. Had the Badgers ever plucked up courage to complain of his tyranny, no one would have been more surprised than the tyrant himself. And the present instance was on a different plane. It was a piece of such voluntary, such flagrant interference as even Mr. Hickey could not fail to recognize. He would be taking a liberty. He would be changing the course of events.

"Blowed if I know," said Mr. Hickey to himself.

It was fortunate that he did not say it aloud; for a moment later he would have had to eat his words. Summoned by the appealing image of Miss Godolphin, resolution returned. What, leave her to marry a lunatic—a lunatic, indeed, of the most inoffensive kind—but who at any moment might turn raving? Leave her to be murdered, perhaps, in a fit of frenzy, or deserted, perhaps, in a fit of absence? Or, at the very best, and supposing his wits returned, to eke out a lifetime at the side of an incompetent pavement artist? So ran Mr. Hickey's thoughts, almost faster than he could follow them; till at last, with a strong sensation of relief, he determined to think no more, but simply to take action.

"Do? There's only one thing *to* do," said Mr. Hickey. "Soon as I get a chance, I shall tell her the whole truth."

It was easier said than done. Bubbles still practically lived at the studio, and Mr. Hickey (thus showing a certain imperviousness to hints) spent every moment of his spare time there; but the chance of a private interview seemed to grow daily more remote. Young Arthur was always there too. When Mr. Beagle, descending to ruse, invited Young

Arthur to come out and have one, Young Arthur refused. And since the whole but undivulged truth makes an uneasy burden, Mr. Hickey's temper, during the next six days, began to verge on the fretty.

"Better give it up, Hickey," advised Mr. Beagle. "You're gettin' touchy as a cab-horse."

"You hold your noise," said Mr. Hickey.

It was decidedly fortunate, therefore, that about twenty minutes after the above conversation, and just as the defeated conspirators were taking their leave, Young Arthur should have suddenly run out for matches while Miss Godolphin remained behind.

The moment—the long-awaited moment—had at last come. Replacing his cap on the peg, Mr. Hickey advanced back into the room.

"Excuse me, miss," said Mr. Hickey.

Bubbles snapped to her bag and smiled invitingly. She didn't particularly want to talk to him, but habit was strong.

"Why, what can be the matter?" she cried. "You look quite upset!"

Involuntarily Mr. Beagle turned round and scrutinized his chief. It was quite true. For the first time within memory those features were disturbed.

"If you'd got a father," began Mr. Hickey obliquely, "things 'ud be different. But there it is: you can't alter Nature." He paused rhetorically, as though before a full audience of Badgers; then with practised agility dropped from abstract to concrete. "Take this young feller here," said Mr. Hickey. "If your Dad was alive, 'e'd have to deal with him. 'E's quite a nice young feller in a way——"

All at once, without even waiting for a pause, Miss Godolphin had interrupted.

"If you're speaking of my *fiancé*," she said stiffly, "you'll please refer to him as Lord Laennec."

Involuntarily they sighed. But whereas the sigh of Mr. Beagle no more than stirred the air, the sigh of Mr. Hickey, produced as it was from the very bottom of his register, made a sound so sudden and sepulchral that Miss Godolphin jumped.

"*Lord!*" repeated Mr. Hickey sadly. "'E's no lord."

"No more lord than I am," corroborated Mr. Beagle.

For a long moment, in the utter silence that followed, not

one of them moved. Then Miss Godolphin opened her bag again and took out a mirror.

"You must be off your nuts," she said calmly.

It was too much. They had meant to break it gently, but that was too much.

"Off *our* nuts!" cried the outraged Mr. Hickey. "It's not us that's off our nuts, it's him. 'Lord Laennec, you'll please call him!' Lord Laennec o' Colney Hatch!"

Surprised, but not intimidated, by the vigour of his outburst, the lady sprang to her feet.

"When Lord Laennec comes back, I'll make him send for the police!" she countered. "People've been had up in court, so they have, for saying a lot less than that!"

"Don't you be in such a hurry," interposed Mr. Beagle. "There's more things than libel you can be had up for: there's false pretences. Now, how did you come to *know* he was a lord?"

"Because he said so, of course."

"Said so!" repeated Mr. Hickey scornfully. "Naturally 'e said so. Some of 'em says they're Napoleon."

"And he told me who his father was," continued Miss Godolphin. "He's the Duke of Grisedale, and lives in Laennec Castle. I've got a photo of it."

"Photo!" said Mr. Hickey. "They sell 'em in the shops."

"Not like this, they don't. Besides, I've seen the negative."

"Then 'e collected coupons for a camera," said Mr. Hickey.

"And his mother's the Duchess and his sisters are Lady Mary and Lady Ann. And that's as true as I stand here, because I looked it all up in the Free Library."

"Yes, that's all right," agreed Mr. Beagle; "old Pye, he looked it up, too. I s'pose *you've* seen 'em all?"

For the first time she hesitated.

"Well, no, I haven't yet, because they live right up in Yorkshire. And his mother's ever so funny, he says—she thinks no one's good enough for him. But I've seen *their* photos, too, in one of the weeklies."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hickey. "You've never seen *his* picture, have you?"

"That's because he doesn't care for society. He says he just hates balls and things. All he wants, he says, is just to be let paint pictures and left in peace."

"An' I s'pose he doesn't care for decent food neither?" purred Mr. Beagle with irony. "Nor a proper bedroom, nor an overcoat in winter?"

"No, he doesn't. He—he's not like most young men."

"*That 'e isn't,*" said Mr. Hickey. "Now tell me, my dear, where did you first meet him? On a bus, was it?"

"As a matter of fact—it was."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hickey. "And I s'pose he asked if he could paint your picture?"

She stared at him.

"However did you know?"

"Never mind how I know. I know a lot of things. A lot more'n you'd suppose."

She stared again. Then a thought seemed to strike her, and for one brief troubled second her glance dropped from their faces to their feet.

"You're not—you're not detectives?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Hickey. "Not *police* detectives. But you can take it from me, my dear, that we know what we're talkin' about. And what we're tryin' to tell *you* is that this young feller here, instead o' being a lord, is just a pore unfortunate loony."

"Then why isn't he shut up? If he's raving mad, why isn't he in an asylum?"

"Not *mad*, 'e isn't," explained Mr. Hickey, "not raving. Just a little touched like. What you might call loopy. But no fit husband, my dear, for a nice young gel like you."

And then as her glance wavered, as doubt at last gained ground, he had a sudden inspiration. "Facts," he thought, "facts are the thing. . . ." And from a long way off, as though he were listening to a stranger, he heard himself speak.

"As for his *real* name, my dear," said the stranger, "it's Arthur Henry Williams, and his mother was in service all the days of her life. She was parlourmaid at Laennec Castle, and that's how he come to hear of it. . . ."

The voice ceased. There was a queer stifled gasp, proceeding probably from Mr. Beagle, then a shrill torrent of words from which Mr. Hickey's ear, still buzzing with his own audacity, caught but one recurrent phrase.

"I *knew* there was something fishy!" wailed Miss

Godolphin. "I knew there was! I always thought so! Something fishy I always thought there was!"

And at that moment, like Mr. Hickey's so many months earlier, her eye was caught by Young Arthur's masterpiece. It was still there on its easel, though the one blue shape (representing the seashell) had turned, through some flaw of paint or technique, to a dirty grey. The sight seemed to pull her together. Her eyes narrowed, her lips compressed: when she spoke again it was in a tone of frozen calm.

"I must ha' been green!" said Miss Godolphin.

The next instant she spun round and held out her hand. With intuitive sympathy, Mr. Hickey offered his handkerchief. But for once intuition let him down; he had underestimated the lady's fibre. She did not want a handkerchief, she wanted tuppence.

"I'll show him!" cried Miss Godolphin.

She flew to the old-fashioned telephone, jammed in the coins, agitated the hook. Her haste was infectious; within two moments she was through.

"Mr. McBean, please, and don't keep me waiting," snapped Miss Godolphin.

They did not. Before Mr. Hickey had time to wonder, she was plunged into conversation.

"That you, Solly dear? This is Bubbles. Listen, Solly. Are you still running round with that licence in your pocket? Because if you are, sweetie, we'll just pop out and use it. Darling, you've got it in one. I said we'd pop straight out—no, that's not me breathing, it's someone else here." She cast a swift glance over her shoulder, and Mr. Hickey closed his mouth. "Yes, that's why I can't explain: I'll say it all when I see you. And, Solly—don't wait to bring the car round. I'm going to take a taxi."

She slammed down the receiver, snatched up her hat, and darted to the door. But even at that tremendous moment, habit prevailed. On the very threshold, as though jerked by an invisible string, Miss Godolphin turned. There were two men in the room. So she flitted back, and kissed them soundly.

They did not, on the way home, directly mention Mr. Hickey's lie. It was a subject too tremendous for any passing discussion. But Mr. Beagle approved: by some tacit, wild-animal method Mr. Beagle conveyed a thorough approval.

At the door of the "King's Head", however, their tongues were loosened, and in two brief phrases Mr. Hickey defined his position.

"You ought," said Mr. Hickey, "to do a good turn when you can. . . ."

He paused, turned the matter in his mind, and added a rider.

"'E's very young," said Mr. Hickey; "'e'll soon get over it."

And that, oddly enough, was just how the Duchess felt.

"My dear," she said to the Duke, "so long as Arthur comes home, I don't care *what* has happened. It's probably some love affair, poor boy, or he can't sell those awful pictures; but what does that matter? He's very young, he'll soon get over it."

MISS MIX BY CH-L-TTE BR-NTE
THE NINETY-NINE GUARDSMEN BY AL-X-D-R
D-M-S
THE HAUNTED MAN BY CH-R-S D-C-Q-NS



BRET HARTE

BRET HARTE had an adventurous career, wandering over the United States as schoolmaster, printer, and miner, and it was by his brilliant sketches of mining life in California that he built up his literary reputation. *The Heathen Chinee* and other verses won him a high place as a humorous poet.

MISS MIX

I

MY earliest impressions are of a huge, mis-shapen rock, against which the hoarse waves beat unceasingly. On this rock three pelicans are standing in a defiant attitude. A dark sky lowers in the background, while two sea-gulls and a gigantic cormorant eye with extreme disfavour the floating corpse of a drowned woman in the foreground. A few bracelets, coral necklaces, and other articles of jewelry, scattered around loosely, complete this remarkable picture.

It is one which, in some vague, unconscious way, symbolizes, to my fancy, the character of a man. I have never been able to explain exactly why. I think I must have seen the picture in some illustrated volume when a baby, or my mother may have dreamed it before I was born.

As a child I was not handsome. When I consulted the triangular bit of looking-glass which I always carried with me, it showed a pale, sandy, and freckled face, shaded by locks like the colour of sea-weed when the sun strikes it in deep water. My eyes were said to be indistinctive; they were a faint ashen grey; but above them rose—my only beauty—a high, massive, domelike forehead, with polished temples, like door-knobs of the purest porcelain.

Our family was a family of governesses. My mother had been one, and my sisters had the same occupation. Consequently, when at the age of thirteen, my eldest sister handed me the advertisement of Mr. Rawjester, clipped from that day's *Times*, I accepted it as my destiny. Nevertheless, a mysterious presentiment of an indefinite future haunted me in my dreams that night, as I lay upon my little snow-white bed. The next morning, with two band-boxes tied up in silk handkerchiefs, and a hair trunk, I turned my back upon Minerva Cottage for ever.

II

Blunderbore Hall, the seat of James Rawjester, Esq., was encompassed by dark pines and funereal hemlocks on all sides. The wind sang weirdly in the turrets and moaned through the long-drawn avenues of the park. As I approached the house I saw several mysterious figures flit before the windows, and a yell of demoniac laughter answered my summons at the bell. While I strove to repress my gloomy forebodings, the housekeeper, a timid, scared-looking old woman, showed me into the library.

I entered, overcome with conflicting emotions. I was dressed in a narrow gown of dark serge, trimmed with black bugles. A thick green shawl was pinned across my breast. My hands were encased with black half-mittens worked with steel beads; on my feet were large pattens, originally the property of my deceased grandmother. I carried a blue cotton umbrella. As I passed before a mirror, I could not help glancing at it, nor could I disguise from myself the fact that I was not handsome.

Drawing a chair into a recess, I sat down with folded hands, calmly awaiting the arrival of my master. Once or twice a fearful yell rang through the house, or the rattling of chains, and curses uttered in a deep, manly voice, broke upon the oppressive stillness. I began to feel my soul rising with the emergency of the moment.

"You look alarmed, miss. You don't hear anything, my dear, do you?" asked the housekeeper nervously.

"Nothing whatever," I remarked calmly, as a terrific scream, followed by the dragging of chairs and tables in the room above, drowned for a moment my reply. "It is the silence, on the contrary, which has made me foolishly nervous."

The housekeeper looked at me approvingly, and instantly made some tea for me.

I drank seven cups; as I was beginning the eighth, I heard a crash, and the next moment a man leaped into the room through the broken window.

III

The crash startled me from my self-control. The housekeeper bent towards me and whispered:

"Don't be excited. It's Mr. Rawjester—he prefers to come in sometimes in this way. It's his playfulness, ha, ha, ha!"

"I perceive," I said calmly. "It's the unfettered impulse of a lofty soul breaking the tyrannizing bonds of custom," and I turned towards him.

He had never once looked at me. He stood with his back to the fire, which set off the Herculean breadth of his shoulders. His face was dark and expressive; his underjaw squarely formed, and remarkably heavy. I was struck with his remarkable likeness to a gorilla.

As he absently tied the poker into hard knots with his nervous fingers, I watched him with some interest. Suddenly he turned towards me.

"Do you think I'm handsome, young woman?"

"Not classically beautiful," I returned calmly; "but you have, if I may so express myself, an abstract manliness—a sincere and wholesome barbarity which, involving as it does the naturalness"—but I stopped, for he yawned at that moment—an action which singularly developed the immense breadth of his lower jaw—and I saw he had forgotten me. Presently he turned to the housekeeper:

"Leave us."

The old woman withdrew with a curtsy.

Mr. Rawjester deliberately turned his back upon me and remained silent for twenty minutes. I drew my shawl the more closely around my shoulders and closed my eyes.

"You are the governess?" at length he said.

"I am, sir."

"A creature who teaches geography, arithmetic, and the use of the globes—ha!—a wretched remnant of femininity—a skimp pattern of girlhood with a premature flavour of tea-leaves and morality. Ugh!"

I bowed my head silently.

"Listen to me, girl!" he said sternly; "this child you have come to teach—my ward—is not legitimate. She is the offspring of my mistress—a common harlot. Ah! Miss Mix, what do you think of me now?"

"I admire," I replied calmly, "your sincerity. A mawkish regard for delicacy might have kept this disclosure to
I only recognize in your frankness that perfect

community of thought and sentiment which should exist between original natures."

I looked up ; he had already forgotten my presence, and was engaged in pulling off his boots and coat. This done, he sank down in an arm-chair before the fire, and ran the poker wearily through his hair. I could not help pitying him.

The wind howled fearfully without, and the rain beat furiously against the windows. I crept towards him and seated myself on a low stool beside his chair.

Presently he turned, without seeing me, and placed his foot absently in my lap. I affected not to notice it. But he started and looked down.

"You here yet, Carrothead ! Ah, I forgot. Do you speak French ?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"*Taisez-vous !*" he said sharply, with singular purity of accent. I complied. The wind moaned fearfully in the chimney, and the light burned dim. I shuddered in spite of myself. "Ah, you tremble, girl !"

"It is a fearful night."

"Fearful ! Call you this fearful—ha ! ha ! ha ! Look ! you wretched little atom, look !" and he dashed forward, and, leaping out of the window, stood like a statue in the pelting storm, with folded arms. He did not stay long, but in a few minutes he returned by way of the hall chimney. I saw from the way that he wiped his feet on my dress that he had again forgotten my presence.

"You are a governess. What can you teach ?" he asked, suddenly and fiercely thrusting his face in mine.

"Manners !" I replied calmly.

"Ha ! teach *me* !"

"You mistake yourself," I said, adjusting my mittens. "Your manners require not the artificial restraint of society. You are radically polite ; this impetuosity and ferociousness is simply the sincerity which is the basis of a proper deportment. Your instincts are moral ; your better nature, I see, is religious. As St. Paul justly remarks—see chap. 6, 8, 9, and 10——"

He seized a heavy candlestick and threw it at me. I dodged it submissively, but firmly.

"Excuse me," he remarked, as his under-jaw slowly

relaxed. "Excuse me, Miss Mix—but I can't stand St. Paul. Enough—you are engaged."

IV

I followed the housekeeper as she led the way timidly to my room. As we passed into the dark hall in the wing, I noticed that it was closed by an iron gate with a grating. Three of the doors on the corridor were likewise grated. A strange noise, as of shuffling feet, and the howling of infuriated animals, rang through the hall. Bidding the housekeeper good night, and taking the candle, I entered my bed-chamber.

I took off my dress, and putting on a yellow flannel nightgown, which I could not help feeling did not agree with my complexion, I composed myself to rest by reading *Blair's Rhetoric* and *Paley's Moral Philosophy*. I had just put out the light, when I heard voices in the corridor. I listened attentively. I recognized Mr. Rawjester's stern tones.

"Have you fed No. 1?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said a gruff voice, apparently belonging to a domestic.

"How's No. 2?"

"She's a little off her feed just now, but will pick up in a day or two."

"And No. 3?"

"Perfectly furious, sir. Her tantrums are ungovernable."

"Hush!"

The voices died away, and I sank into a fitful slumber.

I dreamed that I was wandering through a tropical forest. Suddenly I saw the figure of a gorilla approaching me. As it neared me, I recognized the features of Mr. Rawjester. He held his hand to his side as if in pain. I saw that he had been wounded. He recognized me and called me by name, but at the same moment the vision changed to an Ashantee village, where, around the fire, a group of negroes were dancing and participating in some wild *Obi* festival. I awoke with the strain still surging in my ears.

"Hokee-pokee wokee fum!"

Good heavens! Could I be dreaming? I heard the voice distinctly on the floor below, and smelt something burning

I arose, with an indistinct presentiment of evil, and hastily putting some cotton in my ears and tying a towel about my head, I wrapped myself in a shawl and rushed downstairs. The door of Mr. Rawjester's room was open. I entered.

Mr. Rawjester lay apparently in a deep slumber, from which even the clouds of smoke that came from the burning curtains of his bed could not rouse him. Around the room a large and powerful negress, scantily attired, with her head adorned with feathers, was dancing wildly, accompanying herself with bone castanets. It looked like some terrible *fetich*.

I did not lose my calmness. After firmly emptying the pitcher, basin, and slop-jar on the burning bed, I proceeded cautiously to the garden, and, returning with the garden-engine, I directed a small stream at Mr. Rawjester.

At my entrance the gigantic negress fled. Mr. Rawjester yawned and woke. I explained to him, as he rose dripping from the bed, the reason of my presence. He did not seem to be excited, alarmed, or discomposed. He gazed at me curiously.

"So you risked your life to save mine, eh! you canary-coloured teacher of infants?"

I blushed modestly, and drew my shawl tightly over my yellow flannel nightgown.

"You love me, Mary Jane—don't deny it! This trembling shows it!" He drew me closely towards him, and said with his deep voice tenderly modulated:

"How's her pooty tootens—did she get her 'ittle tootens wet—b'ess her?"

I understood his allusion to my feet. I glanced down and saw that in my hurry I had put on a pair of his old India-rubbers. My feet were not small or pretty, and the addition did not add to their beauty.

"Let me go, sir," I remarked quietly. "This is all improper; it sets a bad example for your child"; and I firmly but gently extricated myself from his grasp. I approached the door. He seemed for a moment buried in deep thought.

"You say this was a negress?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph; No. 1, I suppose!"

"Who is No. 1, sir?"

"My *first*," he remarked, with a significant and sarcastic smile. Then, relapsing into his old manner, he threw his boots at my head, and bade me begone. I withdrew calmly.

V

My pupil was a bright little girl, who spoke French with a perfect accent. Her mother had been a French ballet-dancer, which probably accounted for it. Although she was only six years old, it was easy to perceive that she had been several times in love. She once said to me :

"Miss Mix, did you ever have the *grande* passion? Did you ever feel a fluttering here?" and she placed her hand upon her small chest, and sighed quaintly, "A kind of distaste for *bonbons* and *caromels*, when the world seemed as tasteless and hollow as a broken cordial drop."

"Then you have felt it, Nina?" I said quietly.

"Oh dear, yes. There was Buttons—that was our page, you know—I loved him dearly, but Papa sent him away. Then there was Dick, the groom, but he laughed at me, and I suffered misery!" and she struck a tragic French attitude. "There is to be company here tomorrow," she added, rattling on with childish *naïveté*," and Papa's sweetheart—Blanche Marabout—is to be here. You know they say she is to be my mamma."

What thrill was this shot through me? But I rose calmly, and administering a slight correction to the child, left the apartment.

Blunderbore House, for the next week, was the scene of gaiety and merriment. That portion of the mansion closed with a grating was walled up, and the midnight shrieks no longer troubled me.

But I felt more keenly the degradation, of my situation. I was obliged to help Lady Blanche at her toilette and help her to look beautiful. For what? To captivate him? Oh—no, no—but why this sudden thrill and faintness? Did he really love her? I had seen him pinch and swear at her. But I reflected that he had thrown a candlestick at my head, and my foolish heart was reassured.

It was a night of festivity, when a sudden message obliged Mr. Rawjester to leave his guests for a few hours. "Make yourselves merry, idiots," he added, under his breath, as he passed me. The door was closed and he was gone.

A half-hour passed. In the midst of the dancing a shriek was heard, and out of the swaying crowd of fainting women

and excited men, a wild figure strode into the room. One glance showed it to be a highwayman, heavily armed, holding a pistol in each hand.

"Let no one pass out of this room!" he said on a voice of thunder. "The house is surrounded and you cannot escape. The first one who crosses yonder threshold will be shot like a dog. Gentlemen, I'll trouble you to approach in single file, and hand me your purses and watches."

Finding resistance useless, the order was ungraciously obeyed.

"Now, ladies, please to pass up your jewelry and trinkets."

This order was still more ungraciously complied with. As Blanche handed to the bandit captain her bracelet, she endeavoured to conceal a diamond necklace, the gift of Mr. Rawjester, in her bosom. But, with a demoniac grin, the powerful brute tore it from its concealment and administering a hearty box on the ear of the young girl, flung her aside.

It was now my turn. With a beating heart, I made my way to the robber chieftain, and sank at his feet. "Oh, sir, I am nothing but a poor governess, pray let me go."

"Oh, ho! A governess? Give me your last month's wages, then. Give me what you have stolen from your master!" and he laughed fiendishly.

I gazed at him quietly, and said in a low voice: "I have stolen nothing from you, Mr. Rawjester!"

"Ah, discovered? Hush! Listen, girl!" he hissed, in a fierce whisper, "utter a syllable to frustrate my plans and you die—aid me, and——" but he was gone.

In a few moments the party, with the exception of myself, were gagged and locked in the cellar. The next moment torches were applied to the rich hangings, and the house was in flames. I felt a strong hand seize me, and bear me out on the open air and place me upon the hillside, where I could overlook the burning mansion. It was Mr. Rawjester.

"Burn!" he said, as he shook his fist at the flames. Then sinking on his knees before me, he said hurriedly:

"Mary Jane, I love you; the obstacles to our union are or will soon be removed. In yonder mansion were confined my three crazy wives. One of them, as you know, attempted to kill me! Ha! this is vengeance! But will you be mine?"

I fell, without a word, upon his neck.

THE NINETY-NINE GUARDSMEN

I

TWENTY years after, the gigantic innkeeper of Provins stood looking at a cloud of dust on the highway.

This cloud of dust betokened the approach of a traveller. Travellers had been rare that season on the highway between Paris and Provins.

The heart of the innkeeper rejoiced. Turning to Dame Perigord, his wife, he said, stroking his white apron :

"St. Denis! make haste and spread the cloth! Add a bottle of Charlevoix to the table. This traveller, who rides so fast, by his pace must be a Monseigneur."

Truly the traveller, clad in the uniform of a musketeer, as he drew up to the door of the hostelry, did not seem to have spared his horse. Throwing his reins to the landlord, he leaped lightly to the ground. He was a young man of four and twenty, and spoke with a slight Gascon accent.

"I am hungry. *Morbleu!* I wish to dine!"

The gigantic innkeeper bowed and led the way to a neat apartment, where a table stood covered with tempting viands. The musketeer at once set to work. Fowls, fish, and *patés* disappeared before him. Perigord sighed as he witnessed the devastation. Only once the stranger paused.

"Wine!"

Perigord brought wine. The stranger drank a dozen bottles. Finally he rose to depart. Turning to the expectant landlord, he said :

"Charge it."

"To whom, your highness?" said Perigord anxiously.

"To his Eminence!"

"Mazarin!" ejaculated the innkeeper.

"The same. Bring me my horse," and the musketeer, remounting his favourite animal, rode away.

The innkeeper slowly turned back into the inn. Scarcely had he reached the courtyard, before the clatter of hoofs again called him to the doorway. A musketeer of a light and graceful figure rode up.

"*Parbleu*, my dear Perigord, I am famishing. What have you got for dinner?"

"Venison, capons, larks, and pigeons, your excellency," replied the obsequious landlord, bowing to the ground.

"Enough!" The young musketeer dismounted and entered the inn. Seating himself at the table replenished by the careful Perigord, he speedily swept it as clean as the first comer.

"Some wine, my brave Perigord," said the graceful young musketeer, as soon as he could find utterance.

Perigord brought three dozen of Charlevoix. The young man emptied them almost at a draught.

"By-by, Perigord," he said lightly, waving his hand, as, preceding the astonished landlord, he slowly withdrew.

"But, your highness—the bill," said the astounded Perigord.

"Ah, the bill. Charge it!"

"To whom?"

"The Queen!"

"What, Madam?"

"The same. Adieu, my good Perigord," and the graceful stranger rode away. An interval of quiet succeeded, in which the innkeeper gazed woefully at his wife. Suddenly he was startled by a clatter of hoofs, and an aristocratic figure stood in the doorway.

"Ah," said the courtier good-naturedly. "What, do my eyes deceive me? No, it is the festive and luxurious Perigord. Perigord, listen. I famish. I languish. I would dine."

The innkeeper again covered the table with viands. Again it was swept clean as the fields of Egypt before the miraculous swarm of locusts. The stranger looked up.

"Bring me another fowl, my Perigord."

"Impossible, your excellency, the larder is stripped clean."

"Another fitch of bacon, then."

"Impossible, your highness—there is no more."

"Well, then, wine!"

The landlord brought one hundred and forty-four bottles. The courtier drank them all.

"One may drink if one cannot eat," said the aristocratic stranger good-humouredly.

The innkeeper shuddered.

The guest rose to depart. The innkeeper came slowly forward with his bill, to which he had covertly added the losses which he had suffered from the previous strangers.

"Ah, the bill—charge it!"

"Charge it! To whom?"

"To the King," said the guest.

"What! His Majesty?"

"Certainly. Farewell, Perigord."

The innkeeper groaned. Then he went out and took down his sign. Then remarked to his wife:

"I am a plain man, and don't understand politics. It seems, however, that the country is in a troubled state. Between his Eminence the Cardinal, his Majesty the King, and her Majesty the Queen, I am a ruined man."

"Stay," said Dame Perigord. "I have an idea."

"And that is——"

"Become yourself a musketeer."

II

On leaving Provins the first musketeer proceeded to Nangis, where he was reinforced by thirty-three followers. The second musketeer, arriving at Nangis at the same moment, placed himself at the head of thirty-three more. The third guest of the Landlord of Provins arrived at Nangis in time to assemble together thirty-three other musketeers.

The first stranger led the troops of his Eminence.

The second led the troops of the Queen.

The third led the troops of the King.

The fight commenced. It raged terribly for seven hours. The first musketeer killed thirty of the Queen's troops. The second musketeer killed thirty of the King's troops. The third musketeer killed thirty of his Eminence's troops.

By this time it will be perceived the number of musketeers had been narrowed down to four on each side.

Naturally the three principal warriors approached each other.

They simultaneously uttered a cry:

"Aramis !"

"Athos !"

"D'Artagnan !"

They fell into each other's arms.

"And it seems that we are fighting against each other, my children," said the Count de la Fere mournfully.

"How singular !" exclaimed Aramis and D'Artagnan.

"Let us stop this fratricidal warfare," said Athos.

"We will !" they exclaimed together.

"But how to disband our followers ?" queried D'Artagnan.

Aramis winked. They understood each other. "Let us cut 'em down !"

They cut 'em down. Aramis killed three. D'Artagnan three. Athos three.

The friends again embraced. "How like old times !" said Aramis. "How touching !" exclaimed the serious and philosophic Count de la Fere.

The galloping of hoofs caused them to withdraw from each other's embraces. A gigantic figure rapidly approached.

"The innkeeper of Provins !" they cried, drawing their swords.

"Perigord, down with him !" shouted D'Artagnan.

"Stay," said Athos.

The gigantic figure was beside them. He uttered a cry.

"Athos, Aramis, D'Artagnan !"

"Porthos !" exclaimed the astonished trio.

"The same." They all fell in each other's arms.

The Count de la Fere slowly raised his hand to heaven. "Bless you ! Bless you, my children ! However different our opinions may be in regard to politics, we have but one opinion in regard to our own merits. Where can you find a better man than Aramis ?"

"Than Porthos ?" said Aramis.

"Than D'Artagnan ?" said Porthos.

"Than Athos ?" said D'Artagnan.

III

The King descended into the garden. Proceeding cautiously along the terraced walk, he came to the wall immediately below the windows of Madame. To the left were two windows

concealed by vines. They opened into the apartments of La Valliere.

The King sighed.

"It is about nineteen feet to that window," said the King. "If I had a ladder about nineteen feet long, it would reach to that window. This is logic."

Suddenly the King stumbled over something. "St. Denis!" he exclaimed, looking down. It was a ladder, just nineteen feet long.

The King placed it against the wall. In so doing, he fixed the lower end upon the abdomen of a man who lay concealed by the wall. The man did not utter a cry or wince. The King suspected nothing. He ascended the ladder.

The ladder was too short. Louis the Grand was not a tall man. He was still two feet below the window.

"Dear me!" said the King.

Suddenly the ladder was lifted two feet from below. This enabled the King to leap in the window. At the further end of the apartment stood a young girl, with red hair and a lame leg. She was trembling with emotion.

"Louise!"

"The King!"

"Ah, my God, mademoiselle!"

"Ah, my God, sire!"

But a low knock at the door interrupted the lovers. The King uttered a cry of rage; Louise one of despair.

The door opened and D'Artagnan entered.

"Good evening, sire," said the musketeer.

The King touched a bell. Porthos appeared in the doorway.

"Good evening, sire."

"Arrest M. D'Artagnan."

Porthos looked at D'Artagnan, and did not move.

The King almost turned purple with rage. He again touched the bell. Athos entered.

"Count, arrest Porthos and D'Artagnan."

The Count de la Fere glanced at Porthos and D'Artagnan, and smiled sweetly.

"*Sacré!* Where is Aramis?" said the King violently.

"Here, sire," and Aramis entered.

"Arrest Athos, Porthos, and D'Artagnan."

Aramis bowed, and folded his arms.

"Arrest yourself!"

Aramis did not move.

The King shuddered and turned pale. "Am I not King of France?"

"Assuredly, sire, but we are also severally Porthos, Aramis, D'Artagnan, and Athos."

"Ah!" said the King.

"Yes, sire."

"What does this mean?"

"It means, your majesty," said Aramis, stepping forward, "that your conduct as a married man is highly improper. I am an Abbé, and I object to these improprieties. My friends here, D'Artagnan, Athos, and Porthos, pure-minded young men, are also terribly shocked. Observe, sire, how they blush!"

Athos, Porthos, and D'Artagnan blushed.

"Ah," said the King thoughtfully. "You teach me a lesson. You are devoted and noble young gentlemen, but your only weakness is your excessive modesty. From this moment I make you all Marshals and Dukes, with the exception of Aramis."

"And me, sire?" said Aramis.

"You shall be an Archbishop!"

The four friends looked up and then rushed into each other's arms. The King embraced Louise de la Valliere, by way of keeping them company. A pause ensued. At last Athos spoke:

"Swear, my children, that next to yourselves, you will respect—the King of France; and remember that 'Forty years after' we will meet again."

THE HAUNTED MAN

I

DON'T tell me that it wasn't a knocker. I had seen it often enough, and I ought to know. So ought the three o'clock beer, in dirty highlows, swinging himself over the railing, or executing a demoniacal jig upon the doorstep ; so ought the butcher, although butchers as a general thing are scornful of such trifles ; so ought the postman, to whom knockers of the most extravagant description were merely human weaknesses, that were to be pitied and used. And so ought, for the matter of that, etc., etc., etc.

But then it was *such* a knocker. A wild, extravagant, and utterly incomprehensible knocker. A knocker so mysterious and suspicious that Policeman X37, first coming upon it, felt inclined to take it instantly in custody, but compromised with his professional instincts by sharply and sternly noting it with an eye that admitted of no nonsense, but confidently expected to detect its secret yet. An ugly knocker ; a knocker with a hard, human face, that was a type of the harder human face within. A human face that held between its teeth a brazen rod. So hereafter in the mysterious future should be held, etc., etc.

But if the knocker had a fierce human aspect in the glare of day, you should have seen it at night, when it peered out of the gathering shadows and suggested an ambushed figure ; when the light of the street lamps fell upon it, and wrought a play of sinister expression in its hard outlines ; when it seemed to wink meaningly at a shrouded figure who, as the night fell darkly, crept up the steps and passed into the mysterious house ; when the swinging door disclosed a black passage into which the figure seemed to lose itself and become a part of the mysterious gloom ; when the night grew boisterous and the fierce wind made furious charges at the knocker, as if to

wrench it off and carry it away in triumph. Such a night as this.

It was a wild and pitiless wind. A wind that had commenced life as a gentle country zephyr, but wandering through manufacturing towns had become demoralized, and reaching the city had plunged into extravagant dissipation and wild excesses. A roystering wind that indulged in Bacchanalian shouts on the street corners, that knocked off the hats from the heads of helpless passengers, and then fulfilled its duties by speeding away, like all young prodigals—to sea.

He sat alone in a gloomy library listening to the wind that roared in the chimney. Around him novels and story-books were strewn thickly; in his lap he held one with its pages freshly cut, and turned the leaves wearily until his eyes rested upon a portrait in its frontispiece. And as the wind howled the more fiercely, and the darkness without fell blacker, a strange and fateful likeness to that portrait appeared above his chair and leaned upon his shoulder. The Haunted Man gazed at the portrait and sighed. The figure gazed at the portrait and sighed too.

"Here again?" said the Haunted Man.

"Here again," it repeated in a low voice.

"Another novel?"

"Another novel."

"The old story?"

"The old story."

"I see a child," said the Haunted Man, gazing from the pages of the book into the fire—"a most unnatural child, a model infant. It is prematurely old and philosophic. It dies in poverty to slow music. It dies surrounded by luxury to slow music. It dies with an accompaniment of golden water and rattling carts to slow music. Previous to its decease it makes a will; it repeats the Lord's Prayer, it kisses the 'boofer lady'. That child——"

"Is mine," said the phantom.

"I see a good woman, undersized. I see several charming women, but they are all undersized. They are more or less imbecile and idiotic, but always fascinating and undersized. They wear coquettish caps and aprons. I observe that feminine virtue is invariably below the medium height, and that it is always babyish and infantine. These women——"

"Are mine."

"I see a haughty, proud, and wicked lady. She is tall and queenly. I remark that all proud and wicked women are tall and queenly. That woman——"

"Is mine," said the phantom, wringing his hands.

"I see several things continually impending. I observe that whenever an accident, a murder, or death is about to happen, there is something in the furniture, in the locality, in the atmosphere that foreshadows and suggests it years in advance. I cannot say that in real life I have noticed it—the perception of this surprising fact belongs——"

"To me!" said the phantom. The Haunted Man continued, in a despairing tone:

"I see the influence of this in the magazines and daily papers: I see weak imitators rise up and enfeeble the world with senseless formula. I am getting tired of it. It won't do, Charles, it won't do!" and the Haunted Man buried his head in his hands and groaned. The figure looked down upon him sternly; the portrait in the frontispiece frowned as he gazed.

"Wretched man," said the phantom, "and how have these things affected you?"

"Once I laughed and cried, but then I was younger. Now, I would forget them if I could."

"Have then your wish. And take this with you, man whom I renounce. From this day henceforth you shall live with those whom I displace. Without forgetting me, 'twill be your lot to walk through life as if we had not met. But first you shall survey these scenes that henceforth must be yours. At one tonight, prepare to meet the phantom I have raised. Farewell!"

The sound of its voice seemed to fade away with the dying wind, and the Haunted Man was alone. But the fire-light flickered gaily, and the light danced on the walls, making grotesque figures of the furniture.

"Ha, ha!" said the Haunted Man, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Now for a whisky punch and a cigar."

II

One! The stroke of the far-off bell had hardly died before the front door closed with a reverberating clang. Steps

were heard along the passage; the library door swung open of itself, and the Knocker—yes, the Knocker—slowly strode into the room. The Haunted Man rubbed his eyes—no! There could be no mistake about it—it was the Knocker's face, mounted on a misty, almost imperceptible body. The brazen rod was transferred from its mouth to its right hand, where it was held like a ghostly truncheon.

"It's a cold evening," said the Haunted Man.

"It is," said the Goblin, in a hard, metallic voice.

"It must be pretty cold out there," said the Haunted Man, with vague politeness. "Do you ever—will you—take some hot water and brandy?"

"No," said the Goblin.

"Perhaps you'd like it cold, by way of change?" continued the Haunted Man, correcting himself, as he remembered the peculiar temperature with which the Goblin was probably familiar.

"Time flies," said the Goblin coldly. "We have no leisure for idle talk. Come!" He moved his ghostly truncheon towards the window, and laid his hand upon the other's arm. At his touch the body of the Haunted Man seemed to become as thin and incorporeal as that of the Goblin himself, and together they glided out of the window into the black and blowy night.

In the rapidity of their flight the senses of the Haunted Man seemed to leave him. At length they stopped suddenly.

"What do you see?" asked the Goblin.

"I see a battlemented medieval castle. Gallant men in mail ride over the drawbridge, and kiss their gauntleted fingers to fair ladies, who wave their lily hands in return. I see fight and fray and tournament. I hear roaring heralds bawling the charms of delicate women, and shamelessly proclaiming their lovers. Stay. I see a Jewess about to leap from a battlement. I see knightly deeds, violence, rapine, and a good deal of blood. I've seen pretty much the same at Astley's."

"Look again."

"I see purple moors, glens, masculine women, bare-legged men, priggish bookworms, more violence, physical excellence, and blood. Always blood—and the superiority of physical attainments."

"And how do you feel now?" said the Goblin.

The Haunted Man shrugged his shoulders.

"None the better for being carried back and asked to sympathize with a barbarous age."

The Goblin smiled and clutched his arm; they again sped rapidly through the black night, and again halted.

"What do you see?" said the Goblin.

"I see a barrack room, with a mess-table, and a group of intoxicated Celtic officers telling funny stories, and giving challenges to duel. I see a young Irish gentleman capable of performing prodigies of valour. I learn incidentally that the acme of all heroism is the cornetcy of a dragoon regiment. I hear a good deal of French! No, thank you," said the Haunted Man hurriedly, as he stayed the waving hand of the Goblin, "I would rather *not* go to the Peninsula, and don't care to have a private interview with Napoleon."

Again the Goblin flew away with the unfortunate man, and from a strange roaring below them he judged they were above the ocean. A ship hove in sight, and the Goblin stayed its flight. "Look," he said, squeezing his companion's arm.

The Haunted Man yawned. "Don't you think, Charles, you're rather running this thing into the ground? Of course, it's very moral and instructive, and all that. But ain't there a little too much pantomime about it? Come now!"

"Look!" repeated the Goblin, pinching his arm malevolently. The Haunted Man groaned.

"Oh, of course, I see Her Majesty's ship *Arethusa*. Of course I am familiar with her stern First Lieutenant, her eccentric Captain, her one fascinating and several mischievous midshipmen. Of course, I know it's a splendid thing to see all this, and not to be sea-sick. Oh, there the young gentlemen are going to play a trick on the purser. For God's sake, let us go," and the unhappy man absolutely dragged the Goblin away with him.

When they next halted, it was at the edge of a broad and boundless prairie, in the middle of an oak opening.

"I see," said the Haunted Man, without waiting for his cue, but mechanically, and as if he were repeating a lesson which the Goblin had taught him—"I see the Noble Savage. He is very fine to look at! But I observe under his war paint, feathers, and picturesque blanket—dirt, disease, and an un-

symmetrical contour. I observe beneath his inflated rhetoric deceit and hypocrisy. Beneath his physical hardihood, cruelty, malice, and revenge. The Noble Savage is a humbug. I remarked the same to Mr. Catlin."

"Come," said the phantom.

The Haunted Man sighed, and took out his watch. "Couldn't we do the rest of this another time?"

"My hour is almost spent, irreverent being, but there is yet a chance for your reformation. Come!"

Again they sped through the night, and again they halted. The sound of delicious but melancholy music fell upon their ears.

"I see," said the Haunted Man, with something of interest in his manner, "I see an old moss-covered manse beside a sluggish, flowing river. I see weird shapes: witches, Puritans, clergymen, little children, judges, mesmerized maidens, moving to the sound of melody that thrills me with its sweetness and purity.

"But, although carried along its calm and evenly flowing current, the shapes are strange and frightful: an eating lichen gnaws at the heart of each; not only the clergymen, but witch, maiden, judge, and Puritan, all wear Scarlet Letters of some kind burned upon their hearts. I am fascinated and thrilled, but I feel a morbid sensitiveness creeping over me. I—I beg your pardon." The Goblin was yawning frightfully. "Well, perhaps we had better go."

"One more, and the last," said the Goblin. They were moving home. Streaks of red were beginning to appear in the Eastern sky. Along the banks of the blackly flowing river, by moorland and stagnant fens, by low houses, clustering close to the water's edge, like strange mollusks, crawled upon the beach to dry; by misty black barges, the more misty and indistinct seen through its mysterious veil, the river fog was slowly rising. So rolled away and rose from the Heart of the Haunted Man, etc., etc.

They stopped before a quaint mansion of red brick. The Goblin waved his hand without speaking.

"I see," said the Haunted Man, "a gay drawing-room. I see my old friends of the club, of the college, of society, even as they lived and moved. I see the gallant and unselfish men whom I have loved, and the snobs whom I have hated. I see strangely mingling with them, and now and then blending

with their forms, our old friends Dick Steele, Addison, and Congreve. I observe, though, that these gentlemen have a habit of getting too much in the way. The royal standard of Queen Anne, not in itself a beautiful ornament, is rather too prominent in the picture. The long galleries of black oak, the formal furniture, the old portraits, are picturesque, but depressing. The house is damp. I enjoy myself better here on the lawn, where they are getting up a Vanity Fair. See, the bell rings, the curtain is rising, the puppets are brought out for a new play. Let me see."

The Haunted Man was pressing forward in his eagerness, but the hand of the Goblin stayed him, and pointing to his feet, he saw between him and the rising curtain a new-made grave. And bending above the grave in passionate grief, the Haunted Man beheld the phantom of the previous night.

The Haunted Man started, and—woke. The bright sunshine streamed into the room. The air was sparkling with frost. He ran joyously to the window and opened it. A small boy saluted him with "Merry Christmas". The Haunted Man instantly gave him a Bank of England note. "How much like Tiny Tim, Tom, and Bobby that boy looked—bless my soul, what a genius this Dickens has!"

A knock at the door, and Boots entered.

"Consider your salary doubled instantly. Have you read *David Copperfield*?"

"Yezzur."

"Your salary is quadrupled. What do you think of *The Old Curiosity Shop*?"

The man instantly burst into a torrent of tears, and then into a roar of laughter.

"Enough! Here are five thousand pounds. Open a porter-house, and call it, 'Our Mutual Friend'. Huzza! I feel so happy!" And the Haunted Man danced about the room.

And so, bathed in the light of that blessed sun, and yet glowing with the warmth of a good action, the Haunted Man, haunted no longer, save by those shapes which make the dreams of children beautiful, re-seated himself in his chair, and finished *Our Mutual Friend*.

THE GREY PARROT



W. W. JACOBS

W. W. JACOBS introduced an entirely new type of humorous story with his entertaining yarns of barge skippers and sailormen, though he has proved by *The Monkey's Paw* that he is equally at home in a macabre atmosphere. *Many Cargoes*, *The Skipper's Wooing*, and others of his numerous books are universally popular.

THE GREY PARROT

THE Chief Engineer and the Third sat at tea on the s.s. *Curlew* in the East India Docks. The small and not over-clean steward having placed everything he could think of upon the table, and then added everything the Chief could think of, had assiduously poured out two cups of tea and withdrawn by request. The two men ate steadily, conversing between bites, and interrupted occasionally by a hoarse and sepulchral voice, the owner of which, being much exercised by the sight of the food, asked for it, prettily at first, and afterwards in a way which at least compelled attention.

"That's pretty good for a parrot," said the Third critically. "Seems to know what he's saying too. No, don't give it anything. It'll stop if you do."

"There's no pleasure to *me* in listening to coarse language," said the Chief with dignity.

He absently dipped a piece of bread-and-butter in the Third's tea, and losing it chased it round and round the bottom of the cup with his finger, the Third regarding the operation with an interest and emotion which he was at first unable to understand.

"You'd better pour yourself out another cup," he said thoughtfully as he caught the Third's eye.

"I'm going to," said the other dryly.

"The man I bought it of," said the Chief, giving the bird the sop, "said that it was a perfectly respectable parrot and wouldn't know a bad word if it heard it. I hardly like to give it to my wife now."

"It's no good being too particular," said the Third, regarding him with an ill-concealed grin; "that's the worst of all you young married fellows. Seem to think your wife has got to be wrapped up in brown paper. Ten chances to one she'll be amused."

The Chief shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "I bought

the bird to be company for her," he said slowly ; "she'll be very lonesome without me, Rogers."

"How do you know?" inquired the other.

"She said so," was the reply.

"When you've been married as long as I have," said the Third, who having been married some fifteen years felt that their usual positions were somewhat reversed, "you'll know that generally speaking they're glad to get rid of you."

"What for?" demanded the Chief in a voice that Othello might have envied.

"Well, you get in the way a bit," said Rogers with secret enjoyment ; "you see, you upset the arrangements. House-cleaning and all that sort of thing gets interrupted. They're glad to see you back at first, and then glad to see the back of you."

"There's wives and wives," said the bridegroom tenderly.

"And mine's a good one," said the Third, "registered at Lloyd's, but she don't worry about me going away. Your wife's thirty years younger than you, isn't she?"

"Twenty-five," corrected the other shortly. "You see, what I'm afraid of is that she'll get too much attention."

"Well, women like that," remarked the Third.

"But I don't, damn it!" cried the Chief hotly. "When I think of it I get hot all over. Boiling hot."

"That won't last," said the other reassuringly ; "you won't care twopence this time next year."

"We're not all alike," growled the Chief ; "some of us have got finer feelings than others have. I saw the chap next door looking at her as we passed him this morning."

"Lor'," said the Third.

"I don't want any of your damned impudence," said the Chief sharply. "He put his hat on straighter when he passed us. What do you think of that?"

"Can't say," replied the other with commendable gravity ; "it might mean anything."

"If he has any of his nonsense while I'm away I'll break his neck," said the Chief passionately. "I shall know it."

The other raised his eyebrows.

"I've asked the landlady to keep her eyes open a bit," said the Chief. "My wife was brought up in the country, and she's very young and simple, so that it is quite right and proper for her to have a motherly old body to look after her."

"Told your wife?" queried Rogers.

"No," said the other. "Fact is, I've got an idea about that parrot. I'm going to tell her it's a magic bird, and will tell me everything she does while I'm away. Anything the landlady tells me I shall tell her I got from the parrot. For one thing, I don't want her to go out after seven of an evening, and she's promised me she won't. If she does I shall know, and pretend that I know through the parrot. What do you think of it?"

"Think of it?" said the Third, staring at him. "Think of it? Fancy a man telling a grown-up woman a yarn like that!"

"She believes in warnings and death-watches, and all that sort of thing," said the Chief, "so why shouldn't she?"

"Well, you'll know whether she believes in it or not when you come back," said Rogers, "and it'll be a great pity, because it's a beautiful talker."

"What do you mean?" said the other.

"I mean it'll get its little neck wrung," said the Third.

"Well, we'll see," said Gannett. "I shall know what to think if it does die."

"I shall never see that bird again," said Rogers, shaking his head as the Chief took up the cage and handed it to the steward, who was to accompany him home with it.

The couple left the ship and proceeded down the East India Dock Road side by side, the only incident being a hot argument between a constable and the engineer as to whether he could or could not be held responsible for the language in which the parrot saw fit to indulge when the steward happened to drop it.

The engineer took the cage at his door, and, not without some misgivings, took it upstairs into the parlour and set it on the table. Mrs. Gannett, a simple-looking woman, with sleepy brown eyes and a docile manner, clapped her hands with joy.

"Isn't it a beauty?" said Mr. Gannett, looking at it. "I bought it to be company for you while I'm away."

"You're too good to me, Jem," said his wife. She walked all round the cage admiring it, the parrot, which was of a highly suspicious and nervous disposition, having had boys at its last place, turning with her. After she had walked round him

five times he got sick of it, and in a simple sailorly fashion said so.

"Oh, Jem!" said his wife.

"It's a beautiful talker," said Gannett hastily, "and it's so clever that it picks up everything it hears, but it'll soon forget it."

"It looks as though it knows what you are saying," said his wife. "Just look at it, the artful thing."

The opportunity was too good to be missed, and in a few straightforward lies the engineer acquainted Mrs. Gannett of the miraculous powers with which he had chosen to endow it.

"But you don't believe it?" said his wife, staring at him open-mouthed.

"I do," said the engineer firmly.

"But how can it know what I'm doing when I'm away?" persisted Mrs. Gannett.

"Ah, that's its secret," said the engineer; "a good many people would like to know that, but nobody has found out yet. It's a magic bird, and when you've said that you've said all there is to say about it."

Mrs. Gannett, wrinkling her forehead, eyed the marvellous bird curiously.

"You'll find it's quite true," said Gannett; "when I come back that bird'll be able to tell me how you've been and all about you. Everything you've done during my absence."

"Good gracious!" said the astonished Mrs. Gannett.

"If you stay out after seven of an evening, or do anything else that I shouldn't like, that bird'll tell me," continued the engineer impressively. "It'll tell me who comes to see you, and in fact it will tell me everything you do while I'm away."

"Well, it won't have anything bad to tell of me," said Mrs. Gannett composedly, "unless it tells lies."

"It can't tell lies," said her husband confidently; "and now, if you go and put your bonnet on, we'll drop in at the theatre for half an hour."

It was a prophetic utterance, for he made such a fuss over the man next to his wife offering her his opera-glasses that they left, at the urgent request of the management, in almost exactly that space of time.

"You'd better carry me about in a bandbox," said Mrs. Gannett wearily as the outraged engineer stalked home beside her. "What harm was the man doing?"

"You must have given him some encouragement," said Mr. Gannett fiercely—"made eyes at him or something. A man wouldn't offer to lend a lady his opera-glasses without."

Mrs. Gannett tossed her head—and that so decidedly, that a passing stranger turned his head and looked at her. Mr. Gannett accelerated his pace, and, taking his wife's arm, led her swiftly home with a passion too great for words.

By the morning his anger had evaporated, but his misgivings remained. He left after breakfast for the *Curlew*, which was to sail in the afternoon, leaving behind him copious instructions by following which his wife would be enabled to come down and see him off with the minimum exposure of her fatal charms.

Left to herself Mrs. Gannett dusted the room, until, coming to the parrot's cage, she put down the duster and eyed its eerie occupant curiously. She fancied that she saw an evil glitter in the creature's eye, and the knowing way in which it drew the film over it was as near an approach to a wink as a bird could get.

She was still looking at it when there was a knock at the door, and a bright little woman—rather smartly dressed—bustled into the room and greeted her effusively.

"I just came to see you, my dear, because I thought a little outing would do me good," she said briskly; "and if you've no objection I'll come down to the docks with you to see the boat off."

Mrs. Gannett assented readily. It would ease the engineer's mind, she thought, if he saw her with a chaperon.

"Nice bird," said Mrs. Cluffins, mechanically bringing her parasol to the charge.

"Don't do that," said her friend hastily.

"Why not?" said the other.

"Language!" said Mrs. Gannett solemnly.

"Well, I must do something to it," said Mrs. Cluffins restlessly.

She held the parasol near the cage and suddenly opened it. It was a flaming scarlet, and for the moment the shock took the parrot's breath away.

"He don't mind that," said Mrs. Gannett.

The parrot, hopping to the farthest corner of the bottom of his cage, said something feebly. Finding that nothing dreadful happened, he repeated his remark somewhat more

boldly, and, being convinced after all that the apparition was quite harmless and that he had displayed his craven spirit for nothing, hopped back on his perch and raved wickedly.

"If that was my bird," said Mrs. Cluffins, almost as scarlet as her parasol, "I should wring its neck."

"No, you wouldn't," said Mrs. Gannett solemnly. And having quieted the bird by throwing a cloth over its cage, she explained its properties.

"What!" said Mrs. Cluffins, unable to sit still in her chair. "You mean to tell me your husband said that!"

Mrs. Gannett nodded.

"He's awfully jealous of me," she said with a slight simper.

"I wish he was my husband," said Mrs. Cluffins in a thin, hard voice. "I wish C. would talk to *me* like that. I wish somebody would try and persuade C. to talk to me like that."

"It shows he's fond of me," said Mrs. Gannett, looking down.

Mrs. Cluffins jumped up, and snatching the cover off the cage, endeavoured, but in vain, to get the parasol through the bars.

"And you believe that rubbish!" she said scathingly. "Boo, you wretch!"

"I don't believe it," said her friend, taking her gently away and covering the cage hastily just as the bird was recovering, "but I let him think I do."

"I call it an outrage," said Mrs. Cluffins, waving the parasol wildly. "I never heard of such a thing; I'd like to give Mr. Gannett a piece of my mind. Just about half an hour of it. He wouldn't be the same man afterwards—I'd parrot him!"

Mrs. Gannett, soothing her agitated friend as well as she was able, led her gently to a chair and removed her bonnet, and finding that complete recovery was impossible while the parrot remained in the room, took that wonder-working bird outside.

By the time they had reached the docks and boarded the *Curlew* Mrs. Cluffins had quite recovered her spirits. She roamed about the steamer asking questions, which savoured more of idle curiosity than a genuine thirst for knowledge, and was at no pains to conceal her opinion of those who were unable to furnish her with satisfactory replies.

"I shall think of you every day, Jem," said Mrs. Gannett tenderly.

"I shall think of you every minute," said the engineer reproachfully.

He sighed gently and gazed in a scandalized fashion at Mrs. Cluffins, who was carrying on a desperate flirtation with one of the apprentices.

"She's very light-hearted," said his wife, following the direction of his eyes.

"She is," said Mr. Gannett curtly, as the unconscious Mrs. Cluffins shut her parasol and rapped the apprentice playfully with the handle. "She seems to be on very good terms with Jenkins, laughing and carrying on. I don't suppose she's ever seen him before."

"Poor young things," said Mrs. Cluffins solemnly, as she came up to them. "Don't you worry, Mr. Gannett; I'll look after her and keep her from moping."

"You're very kind," said the engineer slowly.

"We'll have a jolly time," said Mrs. Cluffins. "I often wish my husband was a seafaring man. A wife does have more freedom, doesn't she?"

"More what?" inquired Mr. Gannett huskily.

"More freedom," said Mrs. Cluffins gravely. "I always envy sailors' wives. They can do as they like. No husband to look after them for nine or ten months in the year."

Before the unhappy engineer could put his indignant thoughts into words there was a warning cry from the gangway, and with a hasty farewell he hurried below. The visitors went ashore, the gangway was shipped, and in response to the clang of the telegraph the *Curlew* drifted slowly away from the quay and headed for the swing bridge slowly opening in front of her.

The two ladies hurried to the pier-head and watched the steamer down the river until a bend hid it from view. Then Mrs. Gannett, with a sensation of having lost something, due, so her friend assured her, to the want of a cup of tea, went slowly back to her lonely home.

In the period of grass widowhood which ensued, Mrs. Cluffins's visits formed almost the sole relief to the bare monotony of existence. As a companion the parrot was an utter failure, its language being so irredeemably bad that it spent most of its time in the spare room with a cloth over its cage, wondering when the days were going to lengthen a bit. Mrs.

Cluffins suggested selling it, but her friend repelled the suggestion with horror, and refused to entertain it at any price, even that of the publican at the corner, who, having heard of the bird's command of language, was bent upon buying it.

"I wonder what that beauty will have to tell your husband," said Mrs. Cluffins, as they sat together one day some three months after the *Curlen's* departure.

"I should hope that he has forgotten that nonsense," said Mrs. Gannett, reddening; "he never alludes to it in his letters."

"Sell it," said Mrs. Cluffins peremptorily. "It's no good to you, and Hobson would give anything for it almost."

Mrs. Gannett shook her head. "The house wouldn't hold my husband if I did," she remarked with a shiver.

"Oh yes, it would," said Mrs. Cluffins; "you do as I tell you, and a much smaller house than this would hold him. I told C. to tell Hobson he should have it for five pounds."

"But he mustn't," said her friend in alarm.

"Leave yourself right in my hands," said Mrs. Cluffins, spreading out two small palms and regarding them complacently. "It'll be all right, I promise you."

She put her arm round her friend's waist and led her to the window, talking earnestly. In five minutes Mrs. Gannett was wavering, in ten she had given way, and in fifteen the energetic Mrs. Cluffins was en route for Hobson's, swinging the cage so violently in her excitement that the parrot was reduced to holding on to its perch with claws and bill. Mrs. Gannett watched the progress from the window, and with a queer look on her face sat down to think out the points of attack and defence in the approaching fray.

A week later a four-wheeler drove up to the door, and the engineer, darting upstairs three steps at a time, dropped an armful of parcels on the floor, and caught his wife in an embrace which would have done credit to a bear. Mrs. Gannett, for reasons of which lack of muscle was only one, responded less ardently.

"Ha, it's good to be home again," said Gannett, sinking into an easy-chair and pulling his wife on his knee. "And how have you been? Lonely?"

"I got used to it," said Mrs. Gannett softly.

The engineer coughed. "You had the parrot," he remarked.

"Yes, I had the magic parrot," said Mrs. Gannett.

"How's it getting on?" said her husband, looking round.
"Where is it?"

"Part of it is on the mantelpiece," said Mrs. Gannett, trying to speak calmly, "part of it is in a bonnet-box upstairs, some of it's in my pocket, and here is the remainder."

She fumbled in her pocket and placed in his hand a cheap two-bladed clasp-knife.

"On the mantelpiece!" repeated the engineer, staring at the knife; "in a bonnet-box!"

"Those blue vases," said his wife.

Mr. Gannett put his hand to his head. If he had heard aright, one parrot had changed into a pair of vases, a bonnet, and a knife. A magic bird with a vengeance!

"I sold it," said Mrs. Gannett suddenly.

The engineer's knee stiffened inhospitably, and his arm dropped from his wife's waist. She rose quietly and took a chair opposite.

"Sold it!" said Mr. Gannett in awful tones. "Sold my parrot!"

"I didn't like it, Jem," said his wife. "I didn't want that bird watching me, and I did want the vases, and the bonnet, and the little present for you."

Mr. Gannett pitched the little present to the other end of the room.

"You see, it mightn't have told the truth, Jem," continued Mrs. Gannett. "It might have told all sorts of lies about me, and made no end of mischief."

"It couldn't lie," shouted the engineer passionately, rising from his chair and pacing the room. "It's your guilty conscience that's made a coward of you. How dare you sell my parrot?"

"Because it wasn't truthful, Jem," said his wife, who was somewhat pale.

"If you were half as truthful you'd do," vociferated the engineer, standing over her. "You, you deceitful woman."

Mrs. Gannett fumbled in her pocket again, and producing a small handkerchief applied it delicately to her eyes.

"I—I got rid of it for your sake," she stammered. "It used to tell such lies about you. I couldn't bear to listen to it."

"About *me*!" said Mr. Gannett, sinking into his seat and

staring at his wife with very natural amazement. "Tell lies about *me*! Nonsense! How could it?"

"I suppose it could tell me about you as easily as it could tell you about me?" said Mrs. Gannett. "There was more magic in that bird than you thought, Jem. It used to say shocking things about you. I couldn't bear it."

"Do you think you're talking to a child or a fool?" demanded the engineer.

Mrs. Gannett shook her head feebly. She still kept the handkerchief to her eyes, but allowed a portion to drop over her mouth.

"I should like to hear some of the stories it told about me—if you can remember them," said the engineer with bitter sarcasm.

"The first lie," said Mrs. Gannett in a feeble but ready voice, "was about the time you were at Genoa. The parrot said you were at some concert gardens at the upper end of the town."

One moist eye coming mildly from behind the handkerchief saw the engineer stiffen suddenly in his chair.

"I don't suppose there even is such a place," she continued.

"I—believe—there—is," said her husband jerkily. "I've heard—our chaps—talk of it."

"But you haven't been there?" said his wife anxiously.

"*Never!*" said the engineer with extraordinary vehemence.

"That wicked bird said that you got intoxicated there," said Mrs. Gannett in solemn accents, "that you smashed a little marble-topped table and knocked down two waiters, and that if it hadn't been for the captain of the *Pursuit*, who was in there and who got you away, you'd have been locked up. Wasn't it a wicked bird?"

"Horrible!" said the engineer huskily.

"I don't suppose there ever was a ship called the *Pursuit*," continued Mrs. Gannett.

"Doesn't sound like a ship's name," murmured Mr. Gannett.

"Well, then, a few days later it said the *Curlen* was at Naples."

"I never went ashore all the time we were at Naples," remarked the engineer casually.

"The parrot said you did," said Mrs. Gannett.

"I suppose you'll believe your own lawful husband before that damned bird?" shouted Gannett, starting up.

"Of course I didn't believe it, Jem," said his wife. "I'm trying to prove to you that the bird was not truthful, but you're so hard to persuade."

Mr. Gannett took a pipe from his pocket, and with a small knife dug with much severity and determination a hardened plug from the bowl, and blew noisily through the stem.

"There was a girl kept a fruit-stall just by the harbour," said Mrs. Gannett, "and on this evening, on the strength of having bought three-pennyworth of green figs, you put your arm round her waist and tried to kiss her, and her sweetheart, who was standing close by, tried to stab you. The parrot said that you were in such a state of terror that you jumped into the harbour and were nearly drowned."

Mr. Gannett having loaded his pipe lit it slowly and carefully, and with tidy precision got up and deposited the match in the fireplace.

"It used to frighten me so with its stories that I hardly knew what to do with myself," continued Mrs. Gannett. "When you were at Suez——"

The engineer waved his hand imperiously.

"That's enough," he said stiffly.

"I'm sure I don't want to have to repeat what it told me about Suez," said his wife. "I thought you'd like to hear it, that's all."

"Not at all," said the engineer, puffing at his pipe. "Not at all."

"But you see why I got rid of the bird, don't you?" said Mrs. Gannett. "If it had told you untruths about me, *you* would have believed them, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Gannett took his pipe from his mouth and took his wife in his extended arms. "No, my dear," he said brokenly, "no more than you believe all this stuff about me."

"And I did quite right to sell it, didn't I, Jem?"

"Quite right," said Mr. Gannett with a great assumption of heartiness. "Best thing to do with it."

"You haven't heard the worst yet," said Mrs. Gannett. "When you were at Suez——"

Mr. Gannett consigned Suez to its only rival, and, thumping the table with his clenched fist, forbade his wife to mention the word again, and desired her to prepare supper.

Not until he heard his wife moving about in the kitchen below did he relax the severity of his countenance. Then his expression changed to one of extreme anxiety, and he restlessly paced the room, seeking for light. It came suddenly.

"Jenkins!" he gasped. "Jenkins and Mrs. Cluffins, and I was going to tell Cluffins about him writing to his wife. I expect he knows the letter by heart."

TO CALIFORNIA AND BACK



ARTEMUS WARD

CHARLES FARRER BROWNE, who adopted the pseudonym of Artemus Ward, lived 1832-1867. He died of consumption, from which he was suffering severely when he delivered his "Lecture" in London. His chief works are his *Travels Among the Mormons* and his *Life in London*. He was the forerunner of the many American humorists who, since his day, have written in peculiar forms of orthography and syntax.

TO CALIFORNIA AND BACK

ON THE STEAMER

NEW YORK, Oct. 13, 1863.

THE steamer *Ariel* starts for California at noon. Her decks are crowded with excited passengers, who instantly undertake to "look after" their trunks and things; and what with our smashing against each other, and the yells of the porters, and the wails over lost baggage, and the crash of boxes, and the roar of the boilers, we are for the time being about as unhappy a lot of maniacs as were ever thrown together.

I am one of them. I am rushing round with a glaring eye in search of a box.

Great jam, in which I find a sweet young lady with golden hair, clinging to me fondly, and saying, "Dear George, farewell!"—discovers her mistake, and disappears.

I should like to be George some more.

Confusion so great that I seek refuge in a state room, which contains a single lady of forty-five summers, who says, "Base man! leave me!" I leave her.

By and by we cool down, and become somewhat regulated.

Next day.

When the gong sounds for breakfast we are fairly out on the sea, which runs roughly, and the *Ariel* rocks wildly. Many of the passengers are sick, and a young naval officer establishes a reputation as a wit by carrying to one of the invalids a plate of raw salt pork, swimming in cheap molasses. I am not sick; so I roll round the deck in the most cheerful sea-dog manner.

The next day and the next pass by in a serene manner. The waves are smooth now, and we can all eat and sleep. We

might have enjoyed ourselves very well, I fancy, if the *Ariel*, whose capacity was about three hundred and fifty passengers, had not on this occasion carried nearly nine hundred, a hundred at least of whom were children of an unpleasant age. Captain Semmes captured the *Ariel* once, and it is to be deeply regretted that that thrifty buccaneer hadn't made mince-meat of her, because she is a miserable tub at best, and hasn't much more right to be afloat than a second-hand coffin has. I do not know her proprietor, Mr. C. Vanderbilt. But I know of several excellent mill privileges in the State of Maine, and not one of them is so thoroughly *Dam'd* as he was all the way from New York to Aspinwall.

I had far rather say a pleasant thing than a harsh one ; but it is due to the large number of respectable ladies and gentlemen who were on board the steamer *Ariel* with me that I state here that the accommodations on that steamer were very vile. If I did not so state, my conscience would sting me through life, and I should have horrid dreams, like Richard III, Esq.

The proprietor apparently thought we were undergoing transportation for life to some lonely island, and the very waiters who brought us meats that any warder of any penitentiary would blush to offer convicts, seemed to think it was a glaring error our not being in chains.

As a specimen of the liberal manner in which this steamer was managed, I will mention that the purser (a very pleasant person, by the way) was made to unite the positions of purser, baggage clerk, and doctor ; and I one day had a lurking suspicion that he was among the waiters in the dining-cabin, disguised in a white jacket and slipshod pumps.

I have spoken my Piece about the *Ariel*, and I hope Mr. Vanderbilt will reform ere it is too late. Dr. Watts says the vilest sinner may return as long as the gas-meters work well, or words to that effect.

We were so densely crowded on board the *Ariel*, that I cannot conscientiously say we were altogether happy. And sea-voyages at best are a little stupid. On the whole I should prefer a voyage on the Erie Canal, where there isn't any danger, and where you can carry picturesque scenery along with you, so to speak.

THE ISTHMUS

On the ninth day we reached Aspinwall in the Republic of Grenada. The President of New Grenada is a Central American named Mosquero. I was told that he derived quite a portion of his income by carrying passengers' valises and things from the steamer to the hotel in Aspinwall. It was an infamous falsehood. Fancy A. Lincoln carrying carpet-bags and things! And indeed I should rather trust him with them than Mosquero, because the former gentleman, as I think someone has before observed, is "honest".

I entrust my bag to a speckled native, who confidentially gives me to understand that he is the only strictly honest person in Aspinwall. The rest, he says, 'are niggers—which the coloured people of the Isthmus regard as about as scathing a thing as they can say of one another.

I examined the New Grenadian flag, which waves from the chamber window of a refreshment saloon. It is of simple design. You can make one.

Take half of a cotton shirt, that has been worn two months, and dip it in molasses of the Day and Martin brand. Then let the flies gambol over it for a few days, and you have it. It is an emblem of Sweet Liberty.

At the Howard House the man of sin rubbeth the hair of the horse to the bowels of the cat, and our girls are waving their lily-white hoofs in the dazzling waltz.

We have a quadrille, in which an English person slips up and jams his massive brow against my stomach. He apologizes and I say, "All right, my lord." I subsequently ascertain that he superintended the shipping of coals for the British steamers, and owned fighting-cocks.

The ball stops suddenly.

Great excitement. One of our passengers intoxicated and riotous in the street. Openly and avowedly desires the entire Republic of New Grenada to "come on".

In case they do come on, agrees to make it lively for them. Is quieted down at last, and marched off to prison by a squad of Grenadian troops. Is musical as he passes the hotel, and, smiling sweetly upon the ladies and children on the balcony, expresses a distinct desire to be an Angel, and with the Angels

stand. After which he leaps nimbly into the air, and imitates the war-cry of the red man.

The natives amass wealth by carrying valises, etc., then squander it for liquor. My native comes to me as I sit on the verandah of the Howard House smoking a cigar, and solicits the job of taking my things to the cars next morning. He is intoxicated, and has been fighting, to the palpable detriment of his wearing apparel; for he has only one pair of tattered pantaloons and a very small quantity of shirt left.

We go to bed. Eight of us are assigned to a small den upstairs, with only two lame apologies for beds.

Mosquitoes and even rats annoy us fearfully. One bold rat gnaws at the feet of a young Englishman in the party. This was more than the young Englishman could stand, and rising from his bed he asked us if New Grenada wasn't a Republic? We said it was. "I thought so," he said. "Of course I mean no disrespect to the United States of America in the remark, but I think I prefer a bloated monarchy!" He smiled sadly—then, handing his purse and his mother's photograph to another English person, he whispered softly, "If I am eaten up, give them to Me mother—tell her I died like a true Briton, with no faith whatever in the success of a republican form of government!" And then he crept back to bed again.

We start at seven the next morning for Panama.

My native comes bright and early to transport my carpet sack to the railway station. His clothes have suffered still more during the night, for he comes to me now dressed only in a small rag and one boot.

At last we are off. "*Adios, Americanos!*" the natives cry; to which I pleasantly reply, "*Adows!* and long may it be before you have the chance to Do us again."

The cars are comfortable on the Panama railway, and the country through which we pass is very beautiful. But it will not do to trust it much, because it breeds fevers and other unpleasant disorders at all seasons of the year. Like a girl we most all have known, the Isthmus is fair but false.

There are mud huts all along the route, and half-naked savages gaze patronizingly upon us from their doorways. An

elderly lady in spectacles appears to be much scandalized by the scant dress of these people, and wants to know why the Select men don't put a stop to it. From this, and a remark she incidentally makes about her son who has invented a washing machine which will wash, wring, and dry a shirt in ten minutes, I infer that she is from the hills of Old New England, like the Hutchinson family.

The Central American is lazy. The only exercise he ever takes is occasionally to produce a Revolution. When his feet begin to swell and there are premonitory symptoms of gout, he "revolushes" a spell, and then serenely returns to his cigarette and hammock under the palm trees.

These Central American Republics are queer concerns. I do not of course precisely know what a last year's calf's ideas of immortal glory may be, but probably they are about as lucid as those of a Central American in regard to a republican form of government.

And yet I am told they are a kindly people in the main. I never met but one of them—a Costa-Rican, on board the *Ariel*. He lay sick with fever, and I went to him and took his hot hand gently in mine. I shall never forget his look of gratitude. And the next day he borrowed five dollars of me, shedding tears as he put it in his pocket.

At Panama we lost several of our passengers, and among them three Peruvian ladies, who go to Lima, the city of volcanic eruptions and veiled black-eyed beauties.

The Señoritas who leave us at Panama are splendid creatures. They taught me Spanish, and in the soft moonlight we walked on deck and talked of the land of Pizarro. (You know old Piz conquered Peru, and, although he was not educated at West Point, he had still some military talent.) I feel as though I had lost all my relations, including my grandmother and the cooking-stove, when these gay young Señoritas go away.

They do not go to Peru on a Peruvian bark, but on an English steamer.

We find the *St. Louis*, the steamer awaiting us at Panama, a cheerful and well-appointed boat, and commanded by Captain Hudson.

MEXICO

We make Acapulco, a Mexican coast town of some importance, in a few days, and all go ashore.

The pretty peasant girls peddle necklaces made of shells, and oranges, in the streets of Acapulco, on steamer days. They are quite naïve about it. Handing you a necklace they will say, "Me give you *pres-ent*, Señor," and then retire with a low curtsy. Returning, however, in a few moments, they say quite sweetly, "You give me *pres-ent*, Señor, of quarter-dollar!" which you at once do unless you have a heart of stone.

Acapulco was shelled by the French a year or so before our arrival there, and they effected a landing. But the gay and gallant Mexicans peppered them so persistently and effectually from the mountains near by that they concluded to sell out and leave.

Napoleon has no right in Mexico. Mexico may deserve a licking. That is possible enough. Most people do. But nobody has any right to lick Mexico except the United States. We have a right, I flatter myself, to lick this entire continent, including ourselves, any time we want to.

The signal gun is fired at eleven, and we go off to the steamer in small boats.

In our boat is an inebriated United States official, who flings his spectacles overboard and sings a flippant and absurd song about his grandmother's spotted calf, with his *ri-fol-lol-tiddery-i-do*. After which he crumbles, in an incomprehensible manner, into the bottom of the boat, and howls dismally.

We reach Manzanillo, another coast place, twenty-four hours after leaving Acapulco. Manzanillo is a little Mexican village, and looked very wretched indeed, sweltering away there on the hot sands. But it is a port of some importance, nevertheless, because a great deal of merchandise finds its way to the interior from there. The white-and-green flag of Mexico floats from a red steam-tug (the navy of Mexico, by the way, consists of two tugs, a disabled raft, and a basswood

life-preserver) and the Captain of the Port comes off to us in his small boat, climbs up the side of the *St. Louis*, and folds the healthy form of Captain Hudson to his breast. There is no wharf here, and we have to anchor off the town.

There was a wharf, but the enterprising Mexican peasantry, who subsist by poling merchandise ashore in dug-outs, indignantly tore it up. We take on here some young Mexicans, from Colima, who are going to California. They are of the better class, and one young man (who was educated in Madrid) speaks English rather better than I write it. Be careful not to admire any article of an educated Mexican's dress, because if you do he will take it right off and give it to you, and sometimes this might be awkward.

I said: "What a beautiful cravat you wear!"

"It is yours!" he exclaimed, quickly unbuckling it; and I could not induce him to take it back again.

I am glad I did not tell his sister, who was with him and with whom I was lucky enough to get acquainted, what a beautiful white hand she had. She might have given it to me on the spot; and that, as she had soft eyes, a queenly form, and a half-million or so in her own right, would have made me feel bad.

Reports reach us here of high-handed robberies by the banditti all along the road to the City of Mexico. They steal clothes as well as coin. A few days since the mail coach entered the city with all the passengers stark-naked! They must have felt mortified.

CALIFORNIA

We reach San Francisco one Sunday afternoon. I am driven to the Occidental Hotel by a kind-hearted hackman, who states that inasmuch as I have come out there to amuse people, he will only charge me five dollars. I pay it in gold, of course, because greenbacks are not current on the Pacific coast.

Many of the citizens of San Francisco remember the Sabbath day to keep it jolly; and the theatres, the circus, the minstrels, and the music-halls are all in full blast tonight.

I "compromise" and go to the Chinese theatre, thinking perhaps there can be no great harm in listening to worldly sentiments when expressed in a language I don't understand.

The Chinaman at the door takes my ticket with the remark, "Ki hi-hi ki! Shoolah!"

And I tell him that on the whole I think he is right.

The Chinese play is "continued", like a Ledger story, from night to night. It commences with the birth of the hero or heroine, which interesting event occurs publicly on the stage, and then follows him or her down to the grave, where it cheerfully ends.

Sometimes a Chinese play lasts six months. The play I am speaking of had been going on for about two months. The heroine had grown up into womanhood, and was on the point, as I inferred, of being married to a young Chinaman in spangled pantaloons and a long black tail. The bride's father comes in with his arms full of tea chests, and bestows them, with a blessing, upon the happy couple. As this play is to run four months longer, however, and as my time is limited, I go away at the close of the second act, while the orchestra is performing an overture on gongs and one-stringed fiddles.

The door-keeper again says, "Ki hi-hi ki! Shoolah!" adding, this time, however, "Chow-wow." I agree with him in regard to the ki hi and hi ki, but tell him I don't feel altogether certain about the chow-wow.

To Stockton from San Francisco.

Stockton is a beautiful town, that has ceased to think of becoming a very large place, and has quietly settled down into a state of serene prosperity. I have my boots repaired here by an artist who informs me that he studied in the penitentiary; and I visit the lunatic asylum, where I encounter a vivacious maniac who invites me to ride in a chariot drawn by eight lions and a rhinoceros.

John Phoenix was once stationed at Stockton, and put his mother aboard the San Francisco boat one morning with the sparkling remark, "Dear mother, be virtuous and you will be happy!"

Forward to Sacramento—which is the capital of the State, and a very nice old town.

They had a flood here some years ago, during which several blocks of buildings sailed out of town and have never been heard from since. A Chinaman concluded to leave in a wash-tub, and actually set sail in one of those fragile barks.

A drowning man hailed him piteously, thus : "Throw me a rope, oh, throw me a rope !" To which the Chinaman excitedly cried, "No have got—how can do ?" and went on, on with the howling current. He was never seen more ; but a few weeks after his tail was found by some Sabbath-school children in the north part of the State.

I go to the mountain towns. The sensational mining days are over, but I find the people jolly and hospitable nevertheless.

At Nevada I am called upon, shortly after my arrival, by an athletic scarlet-faced man, who politely says his name is Blaze.

"I have a little bill against you, sir," he observes.

"A bill—what for ?"

"For drinks."

"Drinks ?"

"Yes, sir—at my bar. I keep the well-known and highly respected coffee-house down street."

"But, my dear sir, there is a mistake—I never drank at your bar in my life."

"I know it, sir. That isn't the point. The point is this : I pay out money for good liquors, and it is people's own fault if they don't drink them. There are the liquors—do as you please about drinking them, *but you must pay for them!* Isn't that fair ?"

His enormous body (which Puck wouldn't put a girdle round for forty dollars) shook gleefully while I read this eminently original bill.

Years ago Mr. Blaze was an agent of the California Stage Company. There was a formidable and well-organized opposition to the California Stage Company at that time, and Mr. Blaze rendered them such signal service in his capacity of agent that they were very sorry when he tendered his resignation.

"You are some sixteen hundred dollars behind in your accounts, Mr. Blaze," said the president, "but in view of your faithful and efficient services, we shall throw off eight hundred dollars of that amount."

Mr. Blaze seemed touched by this generosity. A tear stood in his eye and his bosom throbbed audibly.

"You *will* throw off eight hundred dollars—you *will* ?"

he at last cried, seizing the president's hand and pressing it passionately to his lips.

"I will," returned the president.

"Well, sir," said Mr. Blaze, "I'm a gentleman, *I am*, you bet! And I won't allow no Stage Company to surpass me in politeness. *I'll throw off the other eight hundred dollars and we'll call it square!* No gratitude, sir—no thanks; it is my duty."

I get back to San Francisco in a few weeks, and am to start home Overland from here.

The distance from Sacramento to Atchison, Kansas, by the Overland stage route, is twenty-two hundred miles, but you can happily accomplish a part of the journey by railway. The Pacific railway is completed twelve miles to Folsham, leaving only two thousand and one hundred and eighty-eight miles to go by stage. This breaks the monotony; but as it is midwinter, and there are well-substantiated reports of Overland passengers freezing to death, and of the Piute savages being in one of their sprightly moods when they scalp people, I do not—I may say that I do not leave the capital of California in a light-hearted and joyous manner. But "leaves have their time to fall", and I have my time to leave, which is now.

We ride all day and all night, and ascend and descend some of the most frightful hills I ever saw. We make Johnson's Pass, which is 6752 feet high, about two o'clock in the morning, and go down the great Kingsbury grade with locked wheels. The driver, with whom I sit outside, informs me, as we slowly roll down this fearful mountain road, which looks down on either side into an appalling ravine, that he has met accidents in his time, and cost the California Stage Company a great deal of money. "Because," he says, "juries is agin us on principle, and every man who sues us is sure to recover. But it will never be so agin, not with *me*, you bet."

"How is that?" I said.

It was frightfully dark. It was snowing withal, and notwithstanding the brakes were kept hard down, the coach slewed wildly, often fairly touching the brink of the black precipice.

"How is that?" I said.

"Why, you see," he replied, "that corpses never sue for damages, but maimed people do. And the next time I have a

overturn I shall go round and kecerfully examine the passengers. Them as is dead I shall let alone ; but them as is mutilated I shall finish with the king-bolt ! Dead folks don't sue. They ain't on it."

Thus with anecdote did this driver cheer me up.

WASHOE

We reach Carson City about nine o'clock in the morning. It is the capital of the silver-producing territory of Nevada.

They shoot folks here somewhat, and the law is rather partial than otherwise to first-class murderers.

I visited the territorial prison, and the Warden points out the prominent convicts to me, thus :

"This man's crime was horse-stealing. He is here for life.

"This man is in for murder. He is here for three years."

But shooting isn't as popular in Nevada as it once was. A few years since they used to have a dead man for breakfast every morning. A reformed desperado told me that he supposed he had killed men enough to stock a grave-yard. "A feeling of remorse," he said, "sometimes comes over me ! But I'm an altered man now. I hain't killed a man for over two weeks ! What'll yer poison yourself with ?" he added, dealing a resonant blow on the bar.

There used to live near Carson City a notorious desperado, who never visited town without killing somebody. He would call for liquor at some drinking-house, and if anybody declined joining him he would at once commence shooting. But one day he shot a man too many. Going into the St. Nicholas drinking-house he asked the company present to join him in a North-American drink. One individual was rash enough to refuse. With a look of sorrow rather than of anger the desperado revealed his revolver, and said, "Good God ! *Must* I kill a man every time I come to Carson ?" and so saying he fired and killed the individual on the spot. But this was the last murder the bloodthirsty miscreant ever committed, for the aroused citizens pursued him with rifles and shot him down in his own door-yard.

I lecture in the theatre at Carson, which opens out of a drinking- and gambling-house. On each side of the door

where my ticket-taker stands there are monte-boards and sweat-cloths, but they are deserted tonight, the gamblers being evidently of a literary turn of mind.

Five years ago there was only a pony-path over the precipitous hills on which now stands the marvellous city of Virginia, with its population of twelve thousand persons, and perhaps more. Virginia, with its stately warehouses and gay shops ; its splendid streets paved with silver ore ; its banking houses and faro-banks ; its attractive coffee-houses and elegant theatre ; its music-halls, and its three daily newspapers.

Virginia is very wild, but I believe it is now pretty generally believed that a mining city must go through with a certain amount of unadulterated cussedness before it can settle down and behave itself in a conservative and seemly manner. Virginia has grown up in the heart of the richest silver regions in the world, the El Dorado of the hour ; and of the immense numbers who are swarming thither not more than half carry their mother's Bible or any settled religion with them. The gambler and the strange woman as naturally seek the new sensational town as ducks take to that element which is so useful for making cocktails and bathing one's feet ; and these people make the new town rather warm for awhile. But by and by the earnest and honest citizens get tired of this ungodly nonsense and organize a Vigilance Committee, which hangs the more vicious of the pestiferous crowd to a sour-apple tree ; and then come good municipal laws, ministers, meeting-houses, and a tolerably sober police in blue coats with brass buttons. About five thousand able-bodied men are in the mines underground here ; some as far down as five hundred feet. The Gould and Curry Mine employs nine hundred men, and annually turns out about twenty million dollars' worth of "demnition gold and silver", as Mr. Mantalini might express it—though silver chiefly.

There are many other mines here and at Gold Hill (another startling silver city, a mile from here), all of which do nearly as well. The silver is melted down into bricks of the size of common house bricks ; then it is loaded into huge wagons, each drawn by eight and twelve mules, and sent off to San Francisco. To a young person fresh from the land of green-backs this careless manner of carting off solid silver is rather of a startler. It is related that a young man who came Overland

from New Hampshire a few months before my arrival became so excited about it that he fell in a fit, with the name of his Uncle Amos on his lips! The hardy miners supposed he wanted his uncle there to see the great sight and faint with him. But this was pure conjecture, after all.

I visit several of the adjacent mining towns, but I do not go to Aurora. No, I think not. A lecturer on psychology was killed there the other night by the playful discharge of a horse-pistol in the hands of a degenerated and intoxicated Spaniard. This circumstance, and a rumour that the citizens are *agin* literature, induce me to go back to Virginia.

I had pointed out to me at a restaurant a man who had killed four men in street broils, and who had that very day cut his own brother's breast open in a dangerous manner with a small supper-knife. He was a gentleman, however. I heard him tell some men so. He admitted it himself. And I don't think he would lie about a little thing like that.

The theatre at Virginia will attract the attention of the stranger, because it is an unusually elegant affair of the kind, and would be so regarded anywhere. It was built, of course, by Mr. Thomas Maguire, the Napoleonic manager of the Pacific, and who has built over twenty theatres in his time, and will perhaps build as many more, unless somebody stops him—which, by the way, will not be a remarkably easy thing to do.

As soon as a mining camp begins to assume the proportions of a city—at about the time the whisky-vendor draws his cork or the gambler spreads his green cloth—Maguire opens a theatre, and with a hastily organized "Vigilance Committee" of actors, commences to execute Shakespeare.

MR. PEPPER

My arrival at Virginia City was signaled by the following incident:

I had no sooner achieved my room in the garret of the International Hotel than I was called upon by an intoxicated man, who said he was an editor. Knowing how rare it was for an editor to be under the blighting influence of either

spirituous or malt liquors, I received this statement doubtfully. But I said :

“What name ?”

“Wait !” he said, and went out.

I heard him pacing unsteadily up and down the hall outside.

In ten minutes he returned and said :

“Pepper !”

Pepper was indeed his name. He had been out to see if he could remember it ; and he was so flushed with his success that he repeated it joyously several times, and then, with a short laugh, he went away.

I have often heard of a man being so drunk that he didn't know what town he lived in, but here was a man so hideously inebriated that he didn't know what his name was.

I saw him no more, but I heard from him. For he published a notice of my lecture, in which he said I had a *dissipated air*.

HORACE GREELEY'S RIDE TO PLACERVILLE

When Mr. Greeley was in California, ovations awaited him at every town. He had written powerful leaders in the *Tribune* in favour of the Pacific Railroad, which had greatly endeared him to the citizens of the Golden State. And therefore they made much of him when he went to see them.

At one town the enthusiastic populace tore his celebrated white coat to pieces, and carried the pieces home to remember him by.

The citizens of Placerville prepared to fête the great journalist, and an extra coach, with extra relays of horses, was chartered of the California Stage Company to carry him from Folsom to Placerville—distance, forty miles. The extra was in some way delayed, and did not leave Folsom until late in the afternoon. Mr. Greeley was to be fêted at seven o'clock that evening by the citizens of Placerville, and it was altogether necessary that he should be there by that hour. So the Stage Company said to Henry Monk, the driver of the extra, “Henry, this great man must be there by seven tonight.”

And Henry answered, “The great man shall be there.”

The roads were in an awful state, and during the first few miles out of Folsom slow progress was made.

"Sir," said Mr. Greeley, "are you aware that I *must* be at Placerville at seven o'clock tonight?"

"I've got my orders!" laconically returned Henry Monk. Still the coach dragged slowly forward.

"Sir," said Mr. Greeley, "this is not a trifling matter. I *must* be there at seven!"

Again came the answer, "I've got my orders!"

But the speed was not increased, and Mr. Greeley chafed away another half-hour; when, as he was again about to remonstrate with the driver, the horses suddenly started into a furious run, and all sorts of encouraging yells filled the air from the throat of Henry Monk.

"That is right, my good fellow!" cried Mr. Greeley. "I'll give you ten dollars when we get to Placerville. Now we *are* going!"

They were indeed, and at a terrible speed.

Crack, crack, went the whip, and again "that voice" split the air. "Git up! Hi yi! G'long! Yip—yip!"

And on they tore, over stones and ruts, up-hill and down-, at a rate of speed never before achieved by stage-horses.

Mr. Greeley, who had been bouncing from one end of the coach to the other like an india-rubber ball, managed to get his head out of the window, when he said:

"Do—on't—on't—on't you—u—u think we—e—e—e shall get there by seven if we do—on't—on't go so fast?"

"I've got my orders!" That was all Henry Monk said. And on tore the coach.

It was becoming serious. Already the journalist was extremely sore from the terrible jolting, and again his head "might have been seen" at the window.

"Sir," he said, "I don't care—care—*air*, if we *don't* get there at seven!"

"I've got my orders!" Fresh horses. Forward again, faster than before. Over rocks and stumps, on one of which the coach narrowly escaped turning a somerset.

"See here!" shrieked Mr. Greeley, "I don't care if we don't get there at all!"

"I've got my orders! I work for the Californy Stage Company, I do. That's wot I *work* for. They said, 'Git this man through by seving.' An' this man's goin' through. You bet! Gerlong! Whoo—ep!"

Another frightful jolt, and Mr. Greeley's bald head

suddenly found its way through the roof of the coach, amidst the crash of small timbers and the ripping of strong canvas.

"Stop you —— maniac !" he roared.

Again answered Henry Monk :

"I've got my orders ! *Keep your seat, Horace !*"

At Mud Springs, a village a few miles from Placerville, they met a large delegation of the citizens of Placerville, who had come out to meet the celebrated editor, and escort him into town. There was a military company, a brass band, and a six-horse wagon-load of beautiful damsels in milk-white dresses, representing all the States in the Union. It was nearly dark now, but the delegation were amply provided with torches, and bonfires blazed all along the road to Placerville.

The citizens met the coach in the outskirts of Mud Springs, and Mr. Monk reined in his foam-covered steeds.

"Is Mr. Greeley on board ?" asked the chairman of the committee.

"*He was, a few miles back !*" said Mr. Monk. "Yes," he added, after looking down through the hole which the fearful jolting had made in the coach-roof—"yes, I can see him ! He is there !"

"Mr. Greeley," said the Chairman of the Committee, presenting himself at the window of the coach, "Mr. Greeley, sir ! We are come most cordially to welcome you, sir—why, God bless me, sir, you are bleeding at the nose !"

"I've got my orders !" cried Mr. Monk. "My orders is as follers : 'Git him there by seving.' It wants a quarter to seving. Stand out of the way !"

"But, sir," exclaimed the Committee-men, seizing the off-leader by the reins—"Mr. Monk, we are come to escort him into town ! Look at the procession, sir, and the brass band, and the people, and the young women, sir !"

"*I've got my orders !*" screamed Mr. Monk. "My orders don't say nothin' about no brass bands and young women. My orders says, 'Git him there by seving.' Let go them lines ! Clear the way there ! Whoo-ep ! *Keep your seat, Horace !*" and the coach dashed wildly through the procession, upsetting a portion of the brass band, and violently grazing the wagon which contained the beautiful young women in white.

Years hence grey-headed men, who were little boys in this

procession, will tell their grandchildren how this stage tore through Mud Springs, and how Horace Greeley's bald head ever and anon showed itself, like a wild apparition, above the coach-roof.

Mr. Monk was in time. There is a tradition that Mr. Greeley was very indignant for a while ; then he laughed, and finally presented Mr. Monk with a brand new suit of clothes.

Mr. Monk himself is still in the employ of the California Stage Company, and is rather fond of relating a story that has made him famous all over the Pacific coast. But he says he yields to no man in his admiration for Horace Greeley.

TO REESE RIVER

I leave Virginia for Great Salt Lake City, via the Reese River Silver Diggings.

There are eight passengers of us inside the coach—which, by the way, isn't a coach, but a Concord covered mud-wagon.

Among the passengers is a genial man of the name of Ryder, who has achieved a widespread reputation as a strangler of unpleasant bears in the mountain fastnesses of California, and who is now an eminent Reese River miner.

We ride night and day, passing through the land of the Piute Indians. Report reaches us that fifteen hundred of these savages are on the rampage, under the command of a red usurper named Buffalo Jim, who seems to be a sort of Jeff Davis, inasmuch as he and his followers have seceded from the regular Piute organization. The seceding savages have announced that they shall kill and scalp all pale-faces (which makes our faces pale, I reckon) found loose in that section. We find the guard doubled at all the stations where we change horses, and our passengers nervously examine their pistols and readjust the long, glittering knives in their belts. I felt in my pockets to see if the key which unlocks the carpet-bag containing my revolvers is all right—for I had rather brilliantly locked my deadly weapons up in that article, which was strapped with the other baggage to the rack behind. The passengers frown on me for this carelessness, but the kind-hearted Ryder gives me a small double-barrelled gun, with which I narrowly escape murdering my beloved friend Hingston in cold blood. I am not used to guns and things,

and in changing the position of this weapon I pulled the trigger rather harder than was necessary.

When this wicked rebellion first broke out I was among the first to stay at home—chiefly because of my utter ignorance of firearms. I should be valuable to the Army as a Brigadier-General only so far as the moral influence of my name went.

However, we pass safely through the land of the Piutes, unmolested by Buffalo James. This celebrated savage can read and write, and is quite an orator, like Metamora, or the last of the Wampanoags. He went on to Washington a few years ago, and called Mr. Buchanan his Great Father, and the members of the Cabinet his dear Brothers. They gave him a great many blankets, and he returned to his beautiful hunting-grounds and went to killing stage-drivers. He made such a fine impression upon Mr. Buchanan during his sojourn in Washington that that statesman gave a young English tourist, who crossed the plains a few years since, a letter of introduction to him. The great Indian chief read the English person's letter with considerable emotion, and then ordered him to be scalped, and stole his trunks.

Mr. Ryder knows me only as "Mr. Brown", and he refreshes me during the journey by quotations from my books and lectures.

"Never seen Ward?" he said.

"Oh no."

"Ward says he likes little girls, but he likes large girls just as well. Haw, haw, haw! I should like to see the d——d fool!"

He referred to me.

He even woke me up in the middle of the night to tell me one of Ward's jokes.

I lecture at Big Creek.

Big Creek is a straggling, wild little village; and the house in which I had the honour of speaking a piece had no other floor than the bare earth. The roof was of sage-brush. At one end of the building a huge wood fire blazed, which, with half a dozen tallow-candles, afforded all the illumination desired. The lecturer spoke from behind the drinking-bar. Behind him long rows of decanters glistened; above him hung pictures of race-horses and prize-fighters; and beside

him, in his shirt-sleeves and wearing a cheerful smile, stood the barman. My speeches at the bar before this had been of an elegant character, perhaps, but quite brief. They never extended beyond "I don't care if I do", "No sugar in mine", and short gems of a like character.

I had a good audience at Big Creek, who seemed to be pleased—the barman especially; for at the close of any "point" that I sought to make, he would deal the counter a vigorous blow with his fist and exclaimed, "Good boy from the New England States, listen to William W. Shakespeare!"

Back to Austin. We lose our way and, hitching our horses to a tree, go in search of some human beings. The night is very dark. We soon stumble upon a camp-fire, and an unpleasantly modulated voice asks us to say our prayers, adding that we are on the point of going to Glory with our boots on. I think perhaps there may be some truth in this, as the mouth of a horse-pistol almost grazes my forehead, while immediately behind the butt of the death-dealing weapon I perceive a large man with black whiskers. Other large men begin to assemble, also with horse-pistols. Dr. Hingston hastily explains, while I go back to the carriage to say my prayers, where there is more room. The men were miners on a prospecting tour, and as we advanced upon them without sending them word they took us for highway robbers.

I must not forget to say that my brave and kind-hearted friend, Ryder of the mail coach, who had so often alluded to "Ward" in our ride from Virginia to Austin, was among my hearers at Big Creek. He had discovered who I was, and informed me that he had debated whether to wallop me or give me some rich silver claims.

GREAT SALT LAKE CITY

How was I to be greeted by the Mormons? That was rather an exciting question with me. I had been told on the plains that a certain humorous sketch of mine (written some years before) had greatly incensed the Saints, and a copy of the Sacramento *Union* newspaper had a few days before fallen into my hands, in which a Salt Lake correspondent quite clearly intimated that my reception at the new Zion might be unpleasantly warm. I ate my dinner moodily and sent out

for some cigars. The venerable clerk brought me six. They cost only two dollars. They were procured at a store near by. The Salt Lake House sells neither cigars nor liquors.

I smoke in my room, having no heart to mingle with the people in the office.

Dr. Hingston "thanks God he never wrote against the Mormons", and goes out in search of a brother Englishman. Comes back at night and says there is a prejudice against me. Advises me to keep in. Has heard that the Mormons thirst for my blood and are on the look-out for me.

Under these circumstances I keep in.

The next day is Sunday, and we go to the Tabernacle in the morning. The Tabernacle is located on — street, and is a long, rakish building of adobe, capable of seating some twenty-five hundred persons. There is a wide platform and a rather large pulpit at one end of the building, and at the other end is another platform for the choir. A young Irishman of the name of Sloan preaches a sensible sort of discourse, to which a Presbyterian could hardly have objected. Last night this same Mr. Sloan enacted a character in a rollicking Irish farce at the theatre! And he played it well, I was told; not so well, of course, as the great Dan Bryant could; but I fancy he was more at home in the Mormon pulpit than Daniel would have been.

The Mormons, by the way, are pre-eminently an amusement-loving people, and the Elders pray for the success of their theatre with as much earnestness as they pray for anything else. The congregation doesn't startle us. It is known, I fancy, that the heads of the Church are to be absent today, and the attendance is slim. There are no ravishingly beautiful women present, and no positively ugly ones. The men are fair to middling. They will never be slain in cold blood for their beauty, nor shut up in gaol for their homeliness.

There are some good voices in the choir today, but the orchestral accompaniment is unusually slight. Sometimes they introduce a full brass and string band in church. Brigham Young says the devil has monopolized the good music long enough, and it is high time the Lord had a portion of it. Therefore trombones are tooted on Sundays in Utah as well as on other days; and there are some splendid musicians there. The orchestra in Brigham Young's theatre is quite equal to any in Broadway. There is a youth in Salt Lake City

(I forget his name) who plays the cornet like a North-American angel.

Mr. Stenhouse relieves me of any anxiety I had felt in regard to having my swan-like throat cut by the Danites, but thinks my wholesale denunciation of a people I had never seen was rather hasty. The following is the paragraph to which the Saints objected. It occurs in an "Artemus Ward" paper on Brigham Young, written some years ago :

"I girded up my Lions and fled the Seen. I packt up my duds and left Salt Lake, which is a 2nd Soddum and Germorer, inhabited by as theavin' & onprincipled a set of retchis as ever drew Breth in eny spot on the Globe."

I had forgotten all about this, and as Elder Stenhouse read it to me "my feelings may be better imagined than described", to use language I think I have heard before. I pleaded, however, that it was a purely burlesque sketch, and that this strong paragraph should not be interpreted literally at all. The Elder didn't seem to see it in that light, but we parted pleasantly.

THE MOUNTAIN FEVER

I go back to my hotel and go to bed, and I do not get up again for two weary weeks. I have the mountain fever (so called in Utah, though it closely resembles the old-style typhus), and my case is pronounced dangerous. I don't regard it so. I don't, in fact, regard anything. I am all right, *myself*. My poor Hingston shakes his head sadly, and Dr. Williamson, from Camp Douglas, pours all kinds of bitter stuff down my throat. I drink his health in a dose of the cheerful beverage known as jalap, and thresh the sheets with my hot hands. I address large assemblages, who have somehow got into my room, and I charge Dr. Williamson with the murder of Luce, and Mr. Irwin, the actor, with the murder of Shakespeare. I have a lucid spell now and then, in one of which James Townsend, the landlord, enters. He whispers, but I hear what he says far too distinctly: "This man can have anything and everything he wants; but I'm no hand for a sick-room. *I never could see anybody die.*"

That was cheering, I thought. The noble Californian, Jerome Davis—he of the celebrated ranch—sticks by me like a twin brother, although I fear that in my hot frenzy I more

than once anathematized his kindly eyes. Nurses and watchers, Gentile and Mormon, volunteer their services in hoops, and rare wines are sent to me from all over the city, which if I can't drink, the venerable and excellent Thomas can, easy.

I lay there in this wild, broiling way for nearly two weeks, when one morning I woke up with my head clear and an immense plaster on my stomach. The plaster had *operated*. I was so raw that I could by no means say to Dr. Williamson, "*Well done*, thou good and faithful servant." I wished he had lathered me before he plastered me. I was fearfully weak. I was frightfully thin. With either one of my legs you could have cleaned the stem of a meerschaum pipe. My backbone had the appearance of a clothes-line with a quantity of English walnuts strung upon it. My face was almost gone. My nose was so sharp that I didn't dare stick it into other people's business for fear it would stay there. But by borrowing my agent's overcoat I succeeded in producing a shadow.

I have been looking at Zion all day, and my feet are sore and my legs are weary. I go back to the Salt Lake House and have a talk with landlord Townsend about the State of Maine. He came from that bleak region, having skinned his infantile eyes in York County. He was at Nauvoo, and was forced to sell out his entire property there for \$50. He has thrived in Utah, however, and is much thought of by the Church. He is an Elder, and preaches occasionally. He has only two wives. I hear lately that he has sold his property for \$25,000 to Brigham Young, and gone to England to make converts. How impressive he may be as an expounder of the Mormon gospel I don't know. His beefsteaks and chicken-pies, however, were first-rate. James and I talk about Maine, and cordially agree that so far as pine boards and horse-mackerel are concerned it is equalled by few and excelled by none. There is no place like home, as Clara, the Maid of Milan, very justly observes; and while J. Townsend would be unhappy in Maine, his heart evidently beats back here now and then.

I heard the love of home oddly illustrated in Oregon, one night, in a country bar-room. Some well-dressed men, in a state of strong drink, were boasting of their respective places of nativity.

"I," said one, "was born in Mississippi, where the sun ever shines and the magnolias bloom all the happy year round."

"And I," said another, "was born in Kentucky—Kentucky, the home of impassioned oratory, the home of Clay, the State of splendid women, of gallant men!"

"And I," said another, "was born in Virginia, the home of Washington, the birthplace of statesmen, the State of chivalric deeds and noble hospitality!"

"And I," said a yellow-haired and sallow-faced man, who was not of this party at all, and who had been quietly smoking a short black pipe by the fire during their magnificent conversation—"and I was born in the garden spot of America."

"Where is that?" they said.

"*Skeouhagan, Maine!*" he replied. "Kin I sell you a razor-strop?"

"I AM HERE"

There is no mistake about that, and there is a good prospect of my staying here for some time to come. The snow is deep on the ground, and more is falling.

The doctor looks glum and speaks of his ill-starred countryman, Sir J. Franklin, who went to the Arctic once too much.

"A good thing happened down here the other day," said a miner from New Hampshire to me. "A man of Boston dressin' went through there, and at one of the stations there wasn't any mules. Says the man who was fixed out to kill in his Boston dressin', 'Where's them mules?' Says the driver, 'Them mules is into the sage-brush. You go catch 'em—that's wot *you* do.' Says the man of Boston dressin', 'Oh no!' Says the driver, 'Oh yes!' and he took his long coach-whip and licked the man of Boston dressin' till he went and caught them mules. How does that strike you as a joke?"

It didn't strike me as much of a joke to pay a hundred and seventy-five dollars in gold fare, and then be horse-whipped by stage-drivers for declining to chase mules. But people's ideas of humour differ, just as people's ideas differ in regard to shrewdness—which reminds me of a little story. Sitting in a New England country store one day I overheard the following dialogue between two brothers:

"Say, Bill, wot you done with that air sorrel mare of yours?"

"Sold her," said William, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Wot'd you git?"

"Hund'd an' fifty dollars, cash deown!"

"Show! Hund'd an' fifty for that kickin' spavin'd critter? Who'd you sell her to?"

"Sold her to Mother!"

"Wot!" exclaimed brother No. 1, "did you raily sell that kickin' spavin'd critter to Mother? Wall, you *air* a shrewd one!"

A Sensation-Arrival by the Overland Stage of two Missouri gals, who have come unescorted all the way through. They are going to Nevada territory to join their father. They are pretty, but, merciful heavens, how they throw the meat and potatoes down their throats! "This is the first squar' meal we've had since we left Rocky Thompson's," said the eldest. Then addressing herself to me, she said:

"Air you the literary man?"

I politely replied that I was one of "them fellers".

"Wall, don't make fun of our clothes in the papers. We air goin' right straight through in these here clothes, *we* air! We ain't goin' to *rag out* till we git to Nevady! Pass them sassiges!"

BRIGHAM YOUNG

Brigham Young sends word I may see him tomorrow. So I go to bed singing the popular Mormon hymn:

Let the chorus still be sung,
Long live Brother Brigham Young,
And blessed be the Vale of Deserét—rét—rét!
And blessed be the Vale of Deserét.

At two o'clock the next afternoon Mr. Hiram B. Clawson, Brigham Young's son-in-law and the chief business manager, calls for me with the Prophet's private sleigh, and we start for that distinguished person's block.

I am shown into the Prophet's chief office. He comes forward, greets me cordially, and introduces me to several influential Mormons who are present.

Brigham Young is 62 years old, of medium height, and with sandy hair and whiskers. An active, iron man, with a

clear, sharp eye. A man of consummate shrewdness—of great executive ability. He was born in the State of Vermont, and so by the way was Heber C. Kimball, who will wear the Mormon Belt when Brigham leaves the ring.

Brigham Young is a man of great natural ability. If you ask me, "How pious is he?" I treat it as a conundrum, and give it up. Personally he treated me with marked kindness throughout my sojourn in Utah.

His power in Utah is quite as absolute as that of any living sovereign, yet he uses it with such consummate shrewdness that his people are passionately devoted to him.

He was an Elder at the first formal Mormon "stake" in this country, at Kirtland, Ohio, and went to Nauvoo with Joseph Smith. That distinguished Mormon handed his mantle and the Prophet business over to Brigham when he died at Nauvoo.

Smith did a more flourishing business in the Prophet line than B. Y. does. Smith used to have his little Revelation almost every day—sometimes two before dinner. B. Y. only takes one once in a while.

The gateway of his block is surmounted by a brass American eagle, and they say ("they say" here means anti-Mormons) that he receives his spiritual despatches through this piece of patriotic poultry. They also say that he receives revelations from a stuffed white calf that is trimmed with red ribbons and kept in an iron box. I don't suppose these things are true. Rumour says that when the Lion House was ready to be shingled, Brigham received a message from the Lord stating that the carpenters must all take hold and shingle it and not charge a red cent for their services. Such carpenters as refused to shingle would go to hell, and no postponement on account of the weather. They say that Brigham, whenever a train of emigrants arrives in Salt Lake City, orders all the women to march up and down before his block, while he stands on the portico of the Lion House and gobbles up the prettiest ones.

He is an immensely wealthy man. His wealth is variously estimated at from ten to twenty millions of dollars. He owns saw mills, grist mills, woollen factories, brass and iron foundries, farms, brickyards, etc., and superintends them all in person. A man in Utah individually owns what he grows and makes with the exception of a one-tenth part: that must

go to the Church ; and Brigham Young, as the first President, is the Church's treasurer. Gentiles, of course, say that he abuses this blind confidence of his people, and speculates with their money, and absorbs the interest if he doesn't the principal. The Mormons deny this, and say that whatever of their money he does use is for the good of the Church ; that he defrays the expenses of emigrants from far over the seas ; that he is foremost in all local enterprises tending to develop the resources of the territory, and that, in short, he is incapable of wrong in any shape.

Nobody seems to know how many wives Brigham Young has. Some set the number as high as eighty, in which case his children must be too numerous to mention. Each wife has a room to herself. These rooms are large and airy, and I suppose they are supplied with all the modern improvements. But never having been invited to visit them I can't speak very definitely about this. When I left the Prophet, he shook me cordially by the hand, and invited me to call again. This was flattering, because if he dislikes a man at the first interview he never sees him again. He made no allusion to the "letter" I had written about his community. Outside, guards were pacing up and down before the gateway, but they smiled upon me sweetly. The verandah was crowded with Gentile miners, who seemed to be surprised that I didn't return in a wooden overcoat, with my throat neatly laid open from ear to ear.

I go to the theatre tonight. The play is *Othello*. This is a really fine play, and was a favourite of G. Washington, the father of his country. On this stage, as upon all other stages, the good old conventionalities are strictly adhered to. The actors cross each other at oblique angles from L. U. E. to R. I. E., on the slightest provocation. Othello howls, Iago scowls, and the boys all laugh when Roderigo dies. I stay to see charming Mrs. Irwin (Desdemona) die, which she does very sweetly.

I was an actor once, myself. I supported Edwin Forrest at a theatre in Philadelphia. I played a pantomimic part. I removed the chairs between the scenes, and I did it so neatly that Mr. F. said I would make a cabinet-maker if I "applied" myself.

The parquet of the theatre is occupied exclusively by the Mormons and their wives and children. They wouldn't let a Gentile in there any more than they would a serpent. In the side seats are those of President Young's wives who go to the play, and a large and varied assortment of children. It is an odd sight to see a jovial old Mormon file down the parquet aisle with ten or twenty robust wives at his heels. Yet this spectacle may be witnessed every night the theatre is opened. The dress circle is chiefly occupied by the officers from Camp Douglas and the Gentile merchants. The upper circles are filled by the private soldiers and Mormon boys. I feel bound to say that a Mormon audience is quite as appreciative as any other kind of an audience. They prefer comedy to tragedy. Sentimental plays, for obvious reasons, are unpopular with them. It will be remembered that when C. Melnotte, in the *Lady of Lyons*, comes home from the wars, he folds Pauline to his heaving heart and makes several remarks of an impassioned and slobbering character. One night when the *Lady of Lyons* was produced here, an aged Mormon arose and went out with his twenty-four wives, angrily stating that he wouldn't sit and see a play where a man made such a *cussed fuss over one woman*. The prices of the theatre are: Parquet, 75 cents; dress circle, \$1; first upper circle, 50; second and third upper circles, 25. In an audience of two thousand persons (and there are almost always that number present) probably a thousand will pay in cash, and the other thousand in grain and a variety of articles: all which will command money, however.

Brigham Young usually sits in the middle of the parquet, in a rocking-chair, and with his hat on. He does not escort his wives to the theatre. They go alone. When the play drags he either falls into a tranquil sleep or walks out. He wears in winter-time a green wrapper, and his hat is the style introduced into this country by Louis Kossuth, Esq., the liberator of Hungaria. (I invested a dollar in the liberty of Hungaria nearly fifteen years ago.)

A PIECE IS SPOKEN

A piece hath its victories no less than war.

"Blessed are the Piece-makers." That is Scripture.

The night of the "comic oration" is come, and the speaker

is arranging his black hair in the star dressing-room of the theatre. The orchestra is playing selections from the Gentile opera of *Un Ballo in Maschera* and the house is full. Mr. John F. Caine, the excellent stage-manager, has given me an elegant drawing-room scene in which to speak my little piece.

[In Iowa, I once lectured in a theatre, and the heartless manager gave me a dungeon scene.]

The curtain goes up and I stand before a Salt Lake of upturned faces.

I can only say that I was never listened to more attentively and kindly in my life than I was by this audience of Mormons.

Among my receipts at the box-office this night were :

20 bushels of wheat.

5 „ „ corn.

4 „ „ potatoes.

2 „ „ oats.

4 „ „ salt.

2 hams.

1 live pig (Dr. Hingston changed him in the box-office).

1 wolf-skin.

5 pounds honey in the comb.

16 strings of sausages—two pounds to the string.

1 cat-skin.

1 churn (two families went in on this ; it is an ingenious churn, and fetches butter in five minutes by rapid grinding).

1 set children's under-garments, embroidered.

1 firkin of butter.

1 keg of apple-sauce.

One man undertook to pass a dog (a cross between a Scotch terrier and a Welsh rabbit) at the box-office, and another presented a German-silver coffin-plate, but the doctor very justly repulsed them both.

THE BALL

The Mormons are fond of dancing. Brigham and Heber C. dance. So do Daniel H. Wells and the other heads of the Church. Balls are opened with prayer, and when they break up a benediction is pronounced.

I am invited to a ball at Social Hall, and am escorted thither by Brothers Stenhouse and Clawson.

Social Hall is a spacious and cheerful room. The motto of "Our Mountain Home" in brilliant evergreen capitals adorns one end of the hall, while at the other a platform is erected for the musicians, behind whom there is room, for those who don't dance, to sit and look at the festivities. Brother Stenhouse, at the request of President Young, formally introduces me to company from the platform. There is a splendour of costumery about the dancers I had not expected to see. Quadrilles only are danced. The mazurka is considered sinful. Even the old-time round waltz is tabooed. I dance.

The Saints address each other here, as elsewhere, as Brother and Sister. "This way, Sister": "Where are you going, Brother?" etc., etc. I am called Brother Ward. This pleases me, and I dance with renewed vigour.

The Prophet has some very charming daughters, several of whom are present tonight.

I was told they spoke French and Spanish.

The Prophet is more industrious than graceful as a dancer. He exhibits, however, a spryness of legs quite remarkable in a man at his time of life. I didn't see Heber C. Kimball on the floor. I am told he is a loose and reckless dancer, and that many a lily-white toe has felt the crushing weight of his cowhide monitors.

The old gentleman is present, however, with a large number of wives. It is said he calls them his "heifers". "Ain't you goin' to dance with some of my wives?" said a Mormon to me. These things make a Mormon ball more spicy than a Gentile one. The supper is sumptuous, and bear and beaver adorn the bill of fare. I go away at the early hour of two in the morning. The moon is shining brightly on the snow-covered streets. The lamps are out and the town is still as a graveyard.

HURRAH FOR THE ROAD

Time, Wednesday afternoon, February 10th. The Overland Stage, Mr. William Glover on the box, stands before the verandah of the Salt Lake House. The genial Nat Stein is

arranging the way-bill. Our baggage (the overland passenger is allowed only twenty-five pounds) is being put aboard, and we are shaking hands, at a rate altogether furious, with Mormon and Gentile. Among the former are brothers Stenhouse, Caine, Clawson, and Townsend; and among the latter are Harry Riccard, the big-hearted English mountaineer (though once he wore white kids and swallow-tails in Regent Street, and in his boyhood went to school to Miss Edgeworth, the novelist); the daring explorer, Rood, from Wisconsin; the Rev. James McCormick, missionary, who distributes pasteboard tracts among the Bannock miners; and the pleasing child of gore, Captain D. B. Stover, of the Commissary department.

We go away on wheels, but the deep snow compels us to substitute runners twelve miles out.

There are four passengers of us. We pierce the Wahsatch mountains by Parley's Cañon.

A snow-storm overtakes us as the night thickens, and the wind shrieks like a brigade of strong-lunged maniacs, never mind. We are well covered up—our cigars are good—I have on deerskin pantaloons, a deerskin overcoat, a beaver cap, and buffalo overshoes; and so, as I tersely observed before, never mind. Let us laugh the winds to scorn, brave boys! But why is William Glover, driver, lying flat on his back by the roadside, and why am I turning a handspring in the road, and why are the horses tearing wildly down the Wahsatch mountains? It is because William Glover has been thrown from his seat, and the horses are running away. I see him fall off, and it occurs to me that I had better get out. In doing so, such is the velocity of the sleigh, I turn a handspring.

Far ahead I hear the runners clash with the rocks, and I see Dr. Hingston's lantern (he always *would* have a lantern) bobbing about like the binnacle light of an oyster sloop, very close in a chopping sea. Therefore I did not laugh the winds to scorn at much as I did, brave boys.

William G. is not hurt, and together we trudge on after the runaways in the hope of overtaking them, which we do some two miles off. They are in a snowbank, and nobody hurt.

We are soon on the road again, all serene; though I believe the doctor did observe that such a thing could not have occurred under a monarchical form of government.

We reach Weber station, thirty miles from Salt Lake City, and wildly situated at the foot of the grand Echo Cañon, at three o'clock the following morning. We remain over a day here with James Bromley, agent of the Overland Stage line, and who is better known on the plains than Shakespeare is; although Shakespeare has done a good deal for the stage. James Bromley has seen the Overland line grow up from its ponyicy; and, as Fitz-Green Halleck happily observes, none know him but to like his style. He was intended for an agent. In his infancy he used to lisp the refrain:

"I want to be an agent,
And with the agents stand."

I part with this kind-hearted gentleman, to whose industry and ability the Overland line owes much of its success, with sincere regret; and I hope he will soon get rich enough to transplant his charming wife from the Desert to the "White Settlements".

Forward to Fort Bridger in an open sleigh. Night clear, cold, and moonlit. Driver, Mr. Samuel Smart. Through Echo Cañon to Hanging Rock Station. The snow is very deep, there is no path, and we literally shovel our way to Robert Pollock's station, which we achieve in the Course of Time. Mr. P. gets up and kindles a fire, and a snowy nightcap and a pair of very bright black eyes beam upon us from the bed. That is Mrs. Robert Pollock. The long cabin is a comfortable one. I make coffee in my French coffee-pot, and let loose some of the roast chickens in my basket. (Tired of fried bacon and saleratus bread, the principal bill of fare at the stations, we had supplied ourselves with chicken, boiled hams, onions, sausages, sea-bread, canned butter, cheese, honey, etc., etc., an example all Overland traders would do well to follow.) Mrs. Pollock tells me where I can find cream for the coffee, and cups and saucers for the same, and appears so kind, that I regret our stay is so limited that we can't see more of her.

On to Yellow Creek Station. Then Needle Rock—a desolate hut on the Desert, house and barn in one building. The station-keeper is a miserable, toothless wretch, with shaggy yellow hair, but says he's going to get married. I think I see him.

To Bear River. A pleasant Mormon named Myers keeps this station, and he gives us a first-rate breakfast. Robert Curtis takes the reins from Mr. Smart here, and we get on to wheels again. Begin to see groups of trees—a new sight to us.

Pass Quaking Asp Springs and Muddy to Fort Bridger. Here are a group of white buildings, built round a plaza, across the middle of which runs a creek. There are a few hundred troops here under the command of Major Gallagher, a gallant officer and a gentleman well worth knowing. We stay here two days.

We are on the road again, Sunday the 14th, with a driver of the highly floral name of Primrose. At seven the next morning we reach Green River Station, and enter Idaho territory. This is the Bitter Creek division of the Overland route, of which we had heard so many unfavourable stories. The division is really well managed by Mr. Stewart, though the country through which it stretches is the most wretched I ever saw. The water is liquid alkali, and the roads are soft sand. The snow is gone now, and the dust is thick and blinding. So drearily, wearily, we drag onward.

We reach the summit of the Rocky Mountains at midnight on the 17th. The climate changes suddenly, and the cold is intense. We resume runners, have a break-down, and are forced to walk four miles.

I remember that one of the numerous reasons urged in favour of General Fremont's election to the Presidency in 1856 was his finding the path across the Rocky Mountains. Credit is certainly due to that gallant explorer in this respect; but it occurred to me, as I wrung my frost-bitten hands on that dreadful night, that for me deliberately to go over that path in mid-winter was a sufficient reason for my election to any lunatic asylum, by an overwhelming vote. Dr. Hingston made a similar remark, and wondered if he should ever clink glasses with his friend Lord Palmerston again.

We strike the North Platte on the 18th. The fare at the stations is daily improving, and we often have antelope steaks now. They tell us of eggs not far off, and we encourage (by a process not wholly unconnected with bottles) the drivers to keep their mules in motion.

Antelope by the thousand can be seen racing the plains from the coach-windows.

At Elk Mountain we encounter a religious driver named Edward Witney, who never swears at the mules. This has made him distinguished all over the plains. This pious driver tried to convert the doctor, but I am mortified to say that his efforts were not crowned with success. Fort Halleck is a mile from Elk, and here are some troops of the Ohio 11th regiment, under the command of Major Thomas L. Mackey.

On the 20th we reach Rocky Thomas's justly celebrated station at five in the morning, and have a breakfast of hashed black-tailed deer, antelope steaks, ham, boiled bear, honey, eggs, coffee, tea, and cream. That was the squarest meal on the road, except at Weber. Mr. Thomas is a Baltimore "slosher", he informed me. I don't know what that is, but he is a good fellow, and gave us a breakfast fit for a lord, emperor, czar, count, etc. A better couldn't be found at Delmonico's or Parker's. He pressed me to linger with him a few days and shoot bears. It was with several pangs that I declined the generous Baltimorean's invitation.

To Virginia Dale. Weather clear and bright. Virginia Dale is a pretty spot, as it ought to be with such a pretty name; but I treated with no little scorn the advice of a hunter I met there, who told me to give up "literatoor", form a matrimonial alliance with some squaws, and "settle down thar".

Bannock on the brain! That is what is the matter now. Wagon-load after wagon-load of emigrants, bound to the new Idaho gold regions, meet us very hour. Canvas-covered, and drawn for the most part by fine large mules, they make a pleasant panorama, as they stretch slowly over the plains and uplands. We strike the South Platte on Sunday the 21st, and breakfast at Latham, a station of one-horse proportions. We are now in Colorado ("Pike's Peak"), and we diverge from the main route here and visit the flourishing and beautiful city of Denver. Messrs. Langrish and Dougherty, who have so long and so admirably catered to the amusement-lovers of the Far West, kindly withdraw their dramatic corps for a night and allow me to use their pretty little theatre.

We go to the mountains from Denver, visiting the celebrated gold-mining towns Black Hawk and Central City. I leave this queen of all the territories, quite firmly believing that its future is to be no less brilliant than its past has been.

I had almost forgotten to mention that on the way from Latham to Denver, Dr. Hingston and Dr. Seaton (late a

highly admired physician and surgeon in Kentucky, and now a prosperous gold-miner) had a learned discussion as to the formation of the membranes of the human stomach, in which they used words that were over a foot long by actual measurement. I never heard such splendid words in my life; but such was their grandiloquent profundity, and their far-reaching lucidity, that I understood rather less about it when they had finished than I did when they commenced.

Back to Latham again over a marshy road, and on to Nebraska by the main stage-line.

I met Colonel Chivington, commander of the district of Colorado, at Latham.

Colonel Chivington is a Methodist clergyman, and was once a Presiding Elder. A thoroughly earnest man, an eloquent preacher, a sincere believer in the war, he of course brings to his new position a great deal of enthusiasm. This, with his natural military tact, makes him an officer of rare ability; and on more occasions than one he has led his troops against the enemy with resistless skill and gallantry. I take the liberty of calling the President's attention to the fact that this brave man ought to have long ago been a Brigadier-general.

There is, however, a little story about Colonel Chivington that I must tell. It involves the use of a little blank profanity, but the story would be spoilt without it; and as in this case "nothing was meant by it", no great harm can be done. I rarely stain my pages with even mild profanity. It is wicked in the first place, and not funny in the second. I ask the boon of being occasionally stupid, but I could never see the fun of being impious.

Colonel Chivington vanquished the rebels, with his brave Colorado troops, in New Mexico last year, as most people know. At the commencement of the action, which was hotly contested, a shell from the enemy exploded near him, tearing up the ground, and causing Captain Rogers to swear in an awful manner.

"Captain Rogers," said the Colonel, "gentlemen do not swear on a solemn occasion like this. We may fall, but, falling in a glorious cause, let us die as Christians, not as rowdies, with oaths upon our lips. Captain Rogers, let us——"

Another shell, a sprightlier one than its predecessor, tears the earth fearfully in the immediate vicinity of Colonel

Chivington, filling his eyes with dirt, and knocking off his hat.

"Why, d—— their souls to h——," he roared, "they've put my eyes out—as *Captain Rogers would say!*"

But the Colonel's eyes were not seriously damaged, and he went in. Went in, only to come out victorious.

We reach Julesberg, Colorado, the 1st of March. We are in the country of the Sioux Indians now, and encounter them by the hundred. A Chief offers to sell me his daughter (a fair young Indian maiden) for six dollars and two quarts of whisky. I decline to trade.

Meals which have hitherto been \$1.00 each are now 75 cents. Eggs appear on the table occasionally, and we hear of chickens farther on. Nine miles from here we enter Nebraska territory. Here is occasionally a fenced farm, and the ranches have bar-rooms. Buffalo skins and buffalo tongues are for sale at most of the stations. We reach South Platte on the 2nd, and Fort Kearney on the 3rd. The 7th Iowa Cavalry are here, under the command of Major Wood. At Cottonwood, a day's ride back, we had taken aboard Major O'Brien, commanding the troops there, and a very jovial warrior he is, too.

Meals are now down to 50 cents, and a great deal better than when they were \$1.00.

Kansas, one hundred and five miles from Atchison. Atchison! No traveller by sea ever longed to set his foot on shore as we longed to reach the end of our dreary coach-ride over the wildest part of the whole continent. How we talked Atchison, and dreamed Atchison for the next fifty hours! Atchison, I shall always love you. You were evidently mistaken, Atchison, when you told me that in case I "lectured" there, immense crowds would throng to the hall: but you are very dear to me. Let me kiss you for your maternal parent!

We are passing through the reservation of the Otoe Indians, who long ago washed the war-paint from their faces, buried the tomahawk, and settled down into quiet, prosperous farmers.

We rattle leisurely into Atchison on a Sunday evening. Lights gleam in the windows of milk-white churches, and

they tell us, far better than anything else could, that we are back to civilization again.

An overland journey in winter is a better thing to have done than to do. In the spring, however, when the grass is green on the great prairies, I fancy one might make the journey a pleasant one, with his own outfit and a few choice friends.

VERY MUCH MARRIED

Are the Mormon women happy?

I give it up. I don't know.

It is at Great Salt Lake City as it is in Boston. If I go out to tea at the Wilkinses' in Boston, I am pretty sure to find Mr. Wilkins all smiles and sunshine, or Mrs. Wilkins all gentleness and politeness. I am entertained delightfully, and after tea little Miss Wilkins shows me her photograph album and plays the march from Faust on the piano for me. I go away highly pleased with my visit; and yet the Wilkinses may fight like cats and dogs in private. I may no sooner have struck the sidewalk than Mr. W. will be reaching for Mrs. W.'s throat.

Thus it is in the City of the Saints. Apparently the Mormon women are happy. I saw them at their best, of course—at balls, tea-parties, and the like. They were like other women as far as my observation extended. They were hooped, and furbelowed, and shod, and white-collared, and bejewelled; and, like women all over the world, they were softer-eyed and kinder-hearted than men can ever hope to be.

The Mormon girl is reared to believe that the plurality-wife system (as it is delicately called here) is strictly right; and in linking her destiny with a man who has twelve wives, she undoubtedly considers she is doing her duty. She loves the man, probably, for I think it is not true, as so many writers have stated, that girls are forced to marry whomsoever "the Church" may dictate. Some parents no doubt advise, connive, threaten, and in aggravated cases incarcerate here, as some parents have always done elsewhere, and always will do as long as petticoats continue to be an institution.

How these dozen or twenty wives get along without heartburnings and hair-pullings, I can't see.

There are instances on record, you know, where a man don't live in a state of uninterrupted bliss with *one* wife. And to say that a man can possess twenty wives without having his special favourite, or favourites, is to say that he is an angel in boots—which is something I have never been introduced to. You never saw an angel with a beard, although you may have seen the bearded woman.

The Mormon woman is early taught that man, being created in the image of the Saviour, is far more godly than she can ever be, and that for her to seek to monopolize his affections is a species of rank sin. So she shares his affections with five or six or twenty other women, as the case may be.

A man must be amply able to support a number of wives before he can take them. Hence, perhaps, it is that so many old chaps in Utah have young and blooming wives in their seraglios, and so many young men have only one.

I had a man pointed out to me who married an entire family. He had originally intended to marry Jane, but Jane did not want to leave her widowed mother. The other three sisters were not in the matrimonial market for the same reason; so this gallant man married the whole crowd, including the girls' grandmother, who had lost all her teeth, and had to be fed with a spoon. The family were in indigent circumstances, and they could not but congratulate themselves on securing a wealthy husband. It seemed to affect the grandmother deeply, for the first words she said on reaching her new home were: "Now, thank God, I shall have my gruel reg'lar!"

The name of Joseph Smith is worshipped in Utah; and "they say" that although he has been dead a good many years, he still keeps on marrying women by *proxy*. He "reveals" who shall act as his earthly agent in this matter, and the agent faithfully executes the defunct Prophet's commands.

A few years ago I read about a couple being married by telegraph—the young man was in Cincinnati, and the young woman was in New Hampshire. They did not see each other for a year afterwards. I don't see what fun there is in this sort of thing.

I have somewhere stated that Brigham Young is said to have eighty wives. I hardly think he has so many. Mr. Hyde, the backslider, says in his book that "Brigham always sleeps by himself, in a little chamber behind his office"; and if he

has eighty wives I don't blame him. He must be bewildered. I know very well that if I had eighty wives of my bosom I should be confused, and shouldn't sleep anywhere. I undertook to count the long stockings, on the clothes-line, in his back-yard one day, and I used up the multiplication table in less than half an hour.

COOLEY'S BOY AND DOG



MAX ADELER

UNDER the pen-name of MAX ADELER, George Heber Clark, an American journalist born in 1841, wrote many delightful humorous stories. His most famous book was *Out of the Hawly-Bawly*, which brought him world-wide fame. Though in literature the most irresponsible of jokers, he was also a serious politician.

COOLEY'S BOY AND DOG

WHILE we were sitting by the river discussing these and other matters, Cooley's boy, a thoroughly disagreeable urchin, who had been playing with some other boys upon the wharf nearby, tumbled into the water. There was a terrible screaming among his companions, and a crowd quickly gathered upon the pier. For a few moments it seemed as if the boy would drown, for no one was disposed to leap in after him, and there was not a boat within saving distance. But fortunately the current swept him around to the front of the Battery, where the water is shallow, and before he was seriously hurt he was safely landed in the mud that stretches below the low-water mark. Then the excitement, which had been so great as to attract about half the population of the village, died away, and people who had just been filled with horror at the prospect of a tragedy, began to feel a sense of disappointment because their fears had not been realized. I cannot of course say that I was sorry to see the youngster once more upon dry land, but if fate had robbed us of him, we should have accepted the dispensation without grievous complaint.

We did not leave all the nuisances behind us in the city. Cooley's dog and his boy are two very sore afflictions which make life even here very much sadder than it ought to be in a place that pretends to be something in the nature of an earthly paradise. The boy not only preys upon my melon-patch and fruit-trees and upon those of my neighbours, but he has an extraordinary aptitude for creating a disturbance in whatever spot he happens to be. Only last Sunday he caused such a terrible commotion in church that the service had to be suspended for several minutes until he could be removed. The interior of the edifice was painted and varnished recently, and I suppose one of the workmen must have left a clot of varnish upon the back of Cooley's pew, which is directly across the aisle from mine. Cooley's boy was the only representative of

the family at church upon that day, and he amused himself during the earlier portions of the service by kneeling upon the seat and communing with Dr. Jones's boy, who occupied the pew immediately in the rear. Sometimes, when young Cooley would resume a proper position, Jones's boy would stir him up afresh by slyly pulling his hair, whereupon Cooley would wheel about and menace Jones with his fist in a manner which betrayed utter indifference to the proprieties of the place and the occasion, as well as to the presence of the congregation. When Cooley finally sank into a condition of repose, he placed his head, most unfortunately, directly against the lump of undried varnish, while he amused himself by reading the commandments and the other scriptural texts upon the wall behind the pulpit.

In a few moments he attempted to move, but the varnish had mingled with his hair, and it held him securely. After making one or two desperate, but ineffectual efforts to release himself, he became very angry; and supposing that Jones's boy was holding him, he shouted:

"Leg go o' my hair! Leg go o' my hair, I tell you!"

The clergyman paused just as he was entering upon consideration of "secondly", and the congregation looked around in amazement, in time to perceive young Cooley, with his head against the back of the pew, aiming dreadful blows over his shoulder with his fist at some unseen person behind him. And with every thrust he exclaimed:

"I'll smash yer nose after church! I'll go for you, Bill Jones, when I ketch you alone! Leg go o' my hair, I tell you, or I'll knock the stuffin' out o' yer," &c. &c.

Meanwhile, Jones's boy sat up at the very end of his pew, far away from Cooley, and looked as solemn as if the sermon had made a deep impression upon him. Then the sexton came running up, with the idea that the boy had fallen asleep and had *nightmare*, while Mrs. Dr. Magruder sallied out from her pew and over to Cooley's, convinced that he had a fit. When the cause of the disturbance was ascertained, the sexton took out his knife, and after sawing off enough of Cooley's hair to release him, dragged him out of church. The victim retreated unwillingly, glancing around at Jones's boy, and shaking his fist at that urchin as if to indicate that he cherished a deadly purpose against Jones.

Then the sermon proceeded. I suppose a contest between

the two boys has been averted, for only yesterday I saw Jones and Cooley, the younger, playing hop-sotch together in the street in apparent forgetfulness of the sorrows of the sanctuary.

Judge Pitman tells me that one of the reasons why Cooley and his wife disagree is that there is such a difference in their height. Cooley is tall, and Mrs. Cooley is small. Mrs. Cooley told Mrs. Pitman, if the judge is to be believed, that Cooley continually growled because she could not keep step with him. They always start wrong, somehow, when they go out together, and then, while he tries to catch step with her, she endeavours to get in with him. After both have been shuffling about over the pavement for several minutes in a perfectly absurd manner, they go ahead out of step just as before.

When Cooley tried to take short steps like hers, his gait was so ridiculous as to excite remark ; while, if she tried to make such long strides as his, people stopped and looked at her as if they thought she was insane. Then she would strive to take two steps to his one, but she found that two and a half of hers were equal to one of his ; and when she undertook to make that fractional number in order to keep up with him, he would frown at her and say :

"Mrs. Cooley, if you are going to dance the polka mazourka upon the public highway, I'm going home."

I do not receive this statement with implicit confidence in its truthfulness. Pitman's imagination sometimes glows with unnatural heat, and he may have embellished the original narrative of Mrs. Cooley.

I shall probably never receive from any member of the Cooley family a correct account of the causes of the unpleasant differences existing therein, for we are on worse terms than ever with Cooley. His dog became such an intolerable nuisance because of his nocturnal vociferation that some practical humanitarian in the neighbourhood poisoned him. Cooley apparently cherished the conviction that I had killed the animal, and he flung the carcase over the fence into my yard. I threw it back. Cooley returned it. Both of us remained at home that day, and spent the morning handing the inanimate brute to each other across the fence. At noon I called my man to take my place, and Cooley hired a coloured person to relieve him. They kept it up until nightfall, by which time I suppose the corpse must have worn away to a great extent, for at sundown my man buried the tail by my rose-bush and came

into the house, while Cooley's representative resigned and went home.

The departed brute left behind him but one pleasant recollection ; and when I recall it, I feel that he fully avenged my wrongs upon his master. Cooley went out a week or two ago to swim in the creek, and he took the dog with him to watch his clothing. While Cooley bathed the dog slept, but when Cooley emerged from the water the dog did not recognize him in his

Whenever Cooley would attempt to seize a boot, or a stocking, or a shirt, the dog flew at him with such ferocity that he dared not attempt to dress himself. So he stood in the sun until he was almost broiled ; then he went into the water and remained there, dodging up and down for the purpose of avoiding the people who passed occasionally along the road. At last the dog went to sleep again, and Cooley, creeping softly behind the brute, caught it suddenly by the tail and flung it across the stream. Before the dog could recover its senses and swim back, Cooley succeeded in getting some of his clothing on him, and then the dog came sidling up to him, looking as if it expected to be rewarded for its extraordinary vigilance. The manner in which Cooley kicked the faithful animal is said to have been simply dreadful.

I should have entertained a positive affection for that dog if it had not barked at night. But I glad it is gone. We came here to have quietness, and that was unattainable while Cooley's dog remained within view of the moon.

THE WIDOW'S CRUISE



FRANK R. STOCKTON

FRANK R. STOCKTON was one of the most popular American humorous writers in the closing years of the last century, and there is a pleasant mingling of fancy and sentiment in many of his tales. Beside *Rudder Grange*, his most successful work was *The Lady and the Tiger*.

THE WIDOW'S CRUISE

THE widow Duckett lived in a small village about ten miles from the New Jersey sea coast. In this village she was born, here she had married and buried her husband, and here she expected somebody to bury her, but she was in no hurry for that, for she had scarcely reached middle age. She was a tall woman with no apparent fat in her composition, and full of activity, both muscular and mental.

She rose at six o'clock in the morning, cooked breakfast, set the table, washed the dishes when the meal was over, milked, churned, swept, washed, ironed, worked in her little garden, attended to the flowers in the front yard, and in the afternoon knitted and quilted and sewed, and after tea she either went to see her neighbours or had them come to see her. When it was really dark she lighted the lamp in her parlour and read for an hour, and if it happened to be one of Miss Mary Wilkins' books that she read she expressed doubts as to the realism of the characters therein described.

These doubts she expressed to Dorcas Networkorthy, who was a small, plump woman, with a solemn face, who had lived with the widow for many years and who had become her devoted disciple. Whatever the widow did that also did Dorcas; not so well, for her heart told her she could never expect to do that, but with a yearning anxiety to do everything as well as she could. She rose at five minutes past six, and in a subsidiary way she helped to get the breakfast, to eat it, to wash up the dishes, to work in the garden, to quilt, to sew, to visit and receive, and no one could have tried harder than she did to keep awake when the widow read aloud in the evening.

All these things happened every day in the summer time, but in the winter the widow and Dorcas cleared the snow from their little front path instead of attending to the flowers, and in the evening they lighted a fire as well as a lamp in the parlour.

Sometimes, however, something different happened, but this was not often, only a few times in the year. One of the different things occurred when Mrs. Ducket and Dorcas were sitting on their little front porch one summer afternoon, one on the little bench on one side of the door and the other on the little bench on the other side of the door, each waiting, until she should hear the clock strike five, to prepare tea. But it was not yet a quarter to five when a one-horse wagon containing four men came slowly down the street. Dorcas first saw the wagon, and she instantly stopped knitting.

"Mercy on me!" she exclaimed. "Whoever those people are they are strangers here and they don't know where to stop, for they first go to one side of the street and then to the other."

The widow looked round sharply. "Humph!" said she. "Those men are sailor-men. You might see that in a twinkling of an eye. Sailor-men always drive that way because that is the way they sail ships. They first tack in one direction and then in another."

"Mr. Ducket didn't like the sea?" remarked Dorcas for about the three hundredth time.

"No, he didn't," answered the widow for about the two hundred and fiftieth time, for there had been occasions when she thought Dorcas put this question inopportunately. "He hated it, and he was drowned in it through trusting a sailor-man, which I never did nor shall. Do you really believe those men are coming here?"

"Upon my word I do!" said Dorcas, and her opinion was correct.

The wagon drew up in front of Mrs. Ducket's little white house, and the two women sat rigidly, their hands in their laps, staring at the man who drove.

This was an elderly personage with whitish hair, and under his chin a thin whitish beard, which waved in the gentle breeze and gave Dorcas the idea that his head was filled with hair which was leaking out from below.

"Is this the widow Ducket's?" inquired this elderly man, in a strong, penetrating voice.

"That's my name," said the widow, and laying her knitting on the bench beside her she went to the gate. Dorcas also laid her knitting on the bench beside her and went to the gate.

"I was told," said the elderly man, "at a house we touched

at about a quarter of a mile back, that the widow Duckett's was the only house in this village where there was any chance of me and my mates getting a meal. We are four sailors and we are making from the bay over to Cuppertown, and that's eight miles ahead yet and we are all pretty sharp set for something to eat."

"This is the place," said the widow, "and I do give meals if there is enough in the house and everything comes handy."

"Does everything come handy today?" said he.

"It does," said she, "and you can hitch your horse and come in, but I haven't got anything for him."

"Oh, that's all right," said the man, "we brought along stores for him, so we'll just make fast and then come in."

The two women hurried into the house in a state of bustling preparation, for the furnishing of this meal meant one dollar in cash.

The four mariners, all elderly men, descended from the wagon, each one scrambling with alacrity over a different wheel.

A box of broken ship-biscuit was brought out and put on the ground in front of the horse, who immediately set himself to eating with great satisfaction.

Tea was a little late that day, because there were six persons to provide for instead of two, but it was a good meal, and after the four seamen had washed their hands and faces at the pump in the back yard and had wiped them on two towels furnished by Dorcas, they all came in and sat down. Mrs. Duckett seated herself at the head of the table with the dignity proper to the mistress of the house, and Dorcas seated herself at the other end with the dignity proper to the disciple of the mistress. No service was necessary, for everything that was to be eaten or drunk was on the table.

When each of the elderly mariners had had as much bread-and-butter, quickly baked soda-biscuit, dried beef, cold ham, cold tongue and preserved fruit of every variety known, as his storage capacity would permit, the mariner in command, Captain Bird, pushed back his chair, whereupon the other mariners pushed back their chairs.

"Madam," said Captain Bird, "we have all made a good meal, which didn't need to be no better nor more of it, and we're satisfied, but that horse out there has not had time to rest himself enough to go the eight miles that lies ahead of

us, so if it's all the same to you and this good lady, we'd like to sit on that front porch awhile and smoke our pipes. I was a-looking at that porch when I came in, and I bethought to myself what a rare good place it was to smoke a pipe in."

"There's pipes been smoked there," said the widow, rising, "and it can be done again. Inside the house I don't allow tobacco, but on the porch neither of us minds."

So the four captains betook themselves to the porch, two of them seating themselves on the little bench on one side of the door and two of them on the little bench on the other side of the door, and lighted their pipes.

"Shall we clear off the table and wash up the dishes," said Dorcas, "or wait until they are gone?"

"We will wait until they are gone," said the widow, "for now that they are here we might as well have a bit of a chat with them. When a sailor-man lights his pipe he is generally willing to talk, but when he is eatin' you can't get a word out of him."

Without thinking it necessary to ask permission, for the house belonged to her, the widow Ducket brought a chair and put it in the hall close to the open front door, and Dorcas brought another chair and seated herself by the side of the widow.

"Do all you sailor-men belong down there at the bay?" asked Mrs. Ducket, and thus the conversation began, and in a few minutes it had reached a point at which Captain Bird thought it proper to say that a great many strange things happen to seamen sailing on the sea which lands-people never dream of.

"Such as anything in particular?" asked the widow, at which remark Dorcas clasped her hands in expectancy.

At this question each of the mariners took his pipe from his mouth and gazed upon the floor in thought.

"There's a good many strange things happened to me and my mates at sea. Would you and that other lady like to hear any of them?" asked Captain Bird.

"We would like to hear them if they are true," said the widow.

"There's nothing happened to me and my mates that isn't true," said Captain Bird, "and here is something that once happened to me:

"I was on a whaling v'yage when a big sperm whale, just

as mad as a fiery bull, came at us, head on, and struck the ship at the stern with such tremendous force that his head crashed right through her timbers and he went nearly half his length into her hull. The hold was mostly filled with empty barrels, for we was just beginning our voyage, and when he had made kindling wood of these, there was room enough for him. We all expected that it wouldn't take five minutes for the vessel to fill and go to the bottom, and we made ready to take to the boats, but it turned out we didn't need to take to no boats, for as fast as the water rushed into the hold of the ship that whale drank it and squirted it up through the two blow-holes in the top of his head, and as there was an open hatchway just over his head the water all went into the sea again, and that whale kept working day and night pumping the water out until we beached the vessel on the island of Trinidad—the whale helping us wonderful on our way over by the powerful working of his tail, which, being outside in the water, acted like a propeller. I don't believe anything stranger than that ever happened to a whaling ship."

"No," said the widow, "I don't believe anything ever did."

Captain Bird now looked at Captain Sanderson, and the latter took his pipe out of his mouth and said that in all his sailing around the world he had never known anything queerer than what happened to a big steamship he chanced to be on, which ran into an island in a fog. Everybody on board thought the ship was wrecked, but it had twin screws and was going at such a tremendous speed that it turned the island entirely upside down and sailed over it, and he had heard tell that even now people sailing over the spot could look down into the water and see the roots of the trees and the cellars of the houses.

Captain Sanderson now put his pipe back into his mouth, and Captain Burrell took out his pipe.

"I was once in an obelisk ship," said he, "that used to trade regular between Egypt and New York carrying obelisks. We had a big obelisk on board. The way they ship obelisks is to make a hole in the stern of the ship and run the obelisk in, p'inted end foremost, and this obelisk filled up nearly the whole of that ship from stern to bow. We was about ten days out and sailing afore a north-east gale with the engines at full speed when suddenly we spied breakers ahead, and our

Captain saw we was about to run on a bank. Now if we hadn't had an obelisk on board we might have sailed over that bank, but the Captain knew that with an obelisk on board we drew too much water for that, and that we'd be wrecked in about fifty-five seconds if something wasn't done quick. So he had to do something quick, and this is what he did : He ordered all steam on and drove slam-bang on that bank.

"Just as he expected we stopped so suddint that that big obelisk bounced for'ard, its p'inted end foremost, and went clean through the bow and shot out into the sea. The minute it did that the vessel was so lightened that it rose in the water and we easily steamed over the bank. There was one man knocked overboard by the shock when we struck, but as soon as we missed him we went back after him and we got him all right. You see when that obelisk went overboard its butt end, which was heaviest, went down first, and when it touched the bottom it just stood there, and as it was such a big obelisk there was about five and a half feet of it stuck out of the water. The man who was knocked overboard he just swum for that obelisk and he climbed up the hiryglyphics. It was a mighty fine obelisk and the Egyptians had cut their hiryglyphics good and deep so that the man could get hand and foot hold. And when we got to him and took him off he was sitting high and dry on the p'inted end of the obelisk. It was a great pity about the obelisk, for it was a good obelisk, but as I never heard the company tried to raise it I expect it is standing there yet."

Captain Burress now put his pipe back into his mouth and looked at Captain Jenkinson, who removed his pipe and said :

"The queerest thing that ever happened to me was about a shark. We was off the Banks and the time of year was July, and the ice was coming down and we got in among a lot of it. Not far away, off our weather bow, there was a little iceberg which had such a queerness about it that the Captain and three men went in a boat to look at it. The ice was mighty clear ice and you could see almost through it, and right inside of it, not more than three feet above the water-line, and about two feet, or maybe twenty inches, inside the ice, was a whopping big shark, about fourteen feet long—a regular man-eater—frozen in there hard and fast. 'Bless my soul,' said the Captain, 'this is a wonderful curiosity and I'm going to git him out.'"

"Just then one of the men said he saw that shark wink, but

the Captain wouldn't believe him, for he said that shark was frozen stiff and hard and couldn't wink. You see the Captain had his own ideas about things, and he knew that whales was warm-blooded and would freeze if they was shut up in ice, but he forgot that sharks was not whales and that they're cold-blooded just like toads. And there is toads that has been shut up in rocks for thousands of years, and they stayed alive, no matter how cold the place was, because they was cold-blooded, and when the rocks was split out hopped the frog. But as I said before, the Captain forgot sharks was cold-blooded and he determined to git that one out.

"Now you both know, being housekeepers, that if you take a needle and drive it into a hunk of ice you can split it. The Captain had a sail-needle with him and so he drove it into the iceberg right alongside of the shark and split it. Now the minute he did it he knew that the man was right when he said he saw the shark wink, for it flopped out of that iceberg quicker nor a flash of lightning."

"What a happy fish he must have been!" ejaculated Dorcas, forgetful of precedent, so great was her emotion.

"Yes," said Captain Jenkinson, "it was a happy fish enough, but it wasn't a happy Captain. You see that shark hadn't had anything to eat, perhaps for a thousand years, until the Captain came along with his sail-needle."

"Surely you sailor-men do see strange things," now said the widow, "and the strangest thing about them is that they are true."

"Yes, indeed," said Dorcas, "that is the most wonderful thing."

"You wouldn't suppose," said the widow Duckett, glancing from one bench of mariners to the other, "that I have a sea-story to tell, but I have, and if you like I will tell it to you."

Captain Bird looked up a little surprised. "We would like to hear it, indeed we would, madam," said he.

"Ay, ay!" said Captain Burress, and the two other mariners nodded.

"It was a good while ago," she said, "when I was living on the shore near the head of the bay, that my husband was away and I was left alone in the house. One mornin' my sister-in-law, who lived on the other side of the bay, sent me word by a boy on a horse that she hadn't any oil in the house to fill the lamp that she always put in the window to light her

husband home, who was a fisherman, and if I would send her some by the boy she would pay me back as soon as they bought oil.

"The boy said he would stop on his way home and take the oil to her, but he never did stop, or perhaps he never went back, and about five o'clock I began to get dreadfully worried, for I knew if that lamp wasn't in my sister-in-law's window by dark she might be a widow before midnight. So I said to myself, 'I've got to get that oil to her, no matter what happens or how it's done.' Of course I couldn't tell what might happen, but there was only one way it could be done, and that was for me to get into the boat that was tied to the post down by the water and take it to her, for it was too far for me to walk around by the head of the bay. Now the trouble was I didn't know no more about a boat and the managin' of it than any one of you sailor-men knows about clear starchin'. But there wasn't no use of thinkin' what I knew and what I didn't know, for I had to take it to her and there was no way of doin' it except in that boat. So I filled a gallon can, for I thought I might as well take enough while I was about it, and I went down to the water and I unhitched that boat and I put the oil-can into her and then I got in, and off I started, and when I was about a quarter of a mile from the shore——"

"Madam," interrupted Captain Bird, "did you row or—or was there a sail to the boat?"

The widow looked at the questioner for a moment. "No," said she, "I didn't row. I forgot to bring the oars from the house, but it didn't matter for I didn't know how to use them, and if there had been a sail I couldn't have put it up, for I didn't know how to use it either. I used the rudder to make the boat go. The rudder was the only thing that I knew anything about. I'd held a rudder when I was a little girl and I knew how to work it. So I just took hold of the handle of the rudder and turned it round and round, and that made the boat go ahead, you know, and——"

"Madam!" exclaimed Captain Bird, and the other elderly mariners took their pipes from their mouths.

"Yes, that is the way I did it," continued the widow briskly; "big steamships are made to go by a propeller turning round and round at their back ends, and I made the rudder work in the same way, and I got along very well, too, until suddenly, when I was about a quarter of a mile from the shore,

a most terrible and awful storm arose. There must have been a typhoon or a cyclone out at sea, for the waves came up the bay bigger than houses, and when they got to the head of the bay they turned around and tried to get out to sea again; so in this way they continually met, and made the most awful and roarin' pilin' up of waves that ever was known.

"My little boat was pitched about as if it had been a feather in a breeze, and when the front part of it was cleavin' itself down into the water the hind part was stickin' up until the rudder whizzed around like a patent churn with no milk in it. The thunder began to roar and the lightnin' flashed, and three sea-gulls, so nearly frightened to death that they began to turn up the whites of their eyes, flew down and sat on one of the seats of the boat, forgettin' in that awful moment that man was their nat'ral enemy. I had a couple of biscuits in my pocket, because I had thought I might want a bite in crossing, and I crumbled up one of these and fed the poor creatures. Then I began to wonder what I was goin' to do, for things were gettin' awfuller and awfuller every instant, and the little boat was a-heavin' and a-pitchin' and a-rollin' and h'istin' itself up, first on one end and then on the other, to such an extent that if I hadn't kept tight hold of the rudder handle I'd slipped off the seat I was sittin' on.

"All of a sudden I remembered that oil in the can, but just as I was puttin' my fingers on the cork my conscience smote me. 'Am I goin' to use this oil,' I said to myself, 'and let my sister-in-law's husband be wrecked for want of it?' And then I thought that he wouldn't want it all that night and perhaps they would buy oil the next day, and so I poured out about a tumblerful of it on the water, and I can just tell you sailor-men that you never saw anything act as prompt as that did. In three seconds, or perhaps five, the water all around me, for the distance of a small front yard, was just as flat as a table and as smooth as glass, and so invitin' in appearance that the three gulls jumped out of the boat and began to swim about on it, primin' their feathers and looking at themselves in the transparent depths, though I must say that one of them made an awful face as he dipped his bill into the water and tasted kerosene.

"Now I had time to sit quiet in the midst of the placid space I had made for myself and rest from working of the rudder. Truly it was a wonderful and marvellous thing to

look at. The waves was roarin' and leapin' up all around me higher than the roof of this house, and sometimes their tops would reach over so that they nearly met and shut out all view of the stormy sky, which seemed as if it was bein' torn to pieces by blazin' lightnin', while the thunder pealed so tremendous that it almost drowned the roar of the waves. Not only above and all around me was everything terrific and fearful, but even under me it was the same, for there was a big crack in the bottom of the boat as wide as my hand, and through this I could see down into the water beneath, and there was——"

"Madam!" ejaculated Captain Bird, the hand which had been holding his pipe a few inches from his mouth now dropping to his knee, and at this motion the hands which held the pipes of the three other mariners dropped to their knees.

"Of course it sounds strange," continued the widow, "but I know that people can see down into clear water, and the water under me was clear, and the crack was wide enough for me to see through, and down under me was sharks and sword-fishes and other horrible water creatures, which I had never seen before, all driven into the bay, I haven't a doubt, by the violence of the storm out at sea. The thought of my bein' upset and fallin' in among those monsters made my very blood run cold, and involuntary-like I began to turn the handle of the rudder, and in a moment I shot into a wall of ragin' sea-water that was towerin' around me.

"For a second I was fairly blinded and stunned, but I had the cork out of that oil-can in no time, and very soon, you'd scarcely believe it if I told you how soon, I had another placid mill-pond surroundin' of me. I sat there a-pantin' and fannin' with my straw hat, for you'd better believe I was flustered, and then I began to think how long it would take me to make a line of mill-ponds clean across the head of the bay and how much oil it would need and whether I had enough. So I sat and calculated that if a tumblerful of oil would make a smooth place about seven yards across, which I should say was the width of the one I was in, which I calculated by a measure of my eye as to how many breadths of carpet it would take to cover it, and if the bay was two miles across, betwixt our house and my sister-in-law's, and although I couldn't get the thing down to exact figures, I saw pretty soon that I wouldn't have oil enough to make a level cuttin' through all those

mountainous billows, and besides, even if I had enough to take me across, what would be the good of going if there wasn't any oil left to fill my sister-in-law's lamp?

"While I was thinkin' and calculatin' a perfectly dreadful thing happened, which made me think if I didn't get out of this pretty soon I'd find myself in a mighty risky predicament. The oil-can, which I had forgotten to put the cork in, toppled over, and before I could grab it every drop of the oil ran into the hind part of the boat, where it was soaked up by a lot of dry dust that was there. No wonder my heart sank when I saw this. Glancin' wildly around me, as people will do when they are scared, I saw the smooth place I was in gettin' smaller and smaller, for the kerosene was evaporatin', as it will do even off woollen clothes if you give it time enough. The first pond I had come out of seemed to be covered up, and the great, towerin', throbbin' precipice of sea-water was a-closin' around me.

"Castin' down my eyes in despair I happened to look through the crack in the bottom of the boat, and oh! what a blessed relief it was, for down there everything was smooth and still, and I could see the sand on the bottom as level and hard, no doubt, as it was on the beach. Suddenly the thought struck me that that bottom would give me the only chance I had of gettin' out of the frightful fix I was in. If I could fill that oil-can with air and then puttin' it under my arm and takin' a long breath, if I could drop down on that smooth bottom, I might run along toward shore, as far as I could, and then, when I felt my breath was givin' out, I could take a pull at the oil-can and take another run, and then take another pull and another run, and perhaps the can would hold air enough for me until I got near enough to shore to wade to dry land. To be sure the sharks and other monsters were down there, but then they must have been awfully frightened and perhaps they might not remember that man was their nat'ral enemy. Anyway, I thought it would be better to try the smooth water passage down there than stay and be swallowed up by the ragin' waves on top.

"So I blew the can full of air and corked it, and then I tore up some of the boards from the bottom of the boat so as to make a hole big enough for me to get through—and your sailor-men needn't wriggle so when I say that, for you all know a divin' bell hasn't any bottom at all and the water

never comes in—and so when I got the hole big enough I took the oil-can under my arm and was just about to slip down through it when I saw an awful turtle a-walkin' through the sand at the bottom. Now, I might trust sharks and sword-fishes and sea-serpents to be frightened and forget about their nat'ral enemies, but I never could trust a grey turtle as big as a cart, with a black neck a yard long, with yellow bags to its jaws, to forget anything or to remember anything. I'd as lieve get into a bath-tub with a live crab as to go down there. It wasn't of no use even so much as thinkin' of it, so I gave up that plan and didn't once look through that hole again."

"And what did you do, madam?" asked Captain Bird, who was regarding her with a face of stone.

"I used electricity," she said. "Now don't start as if you had a shock of it. That's what I used. When I was younger than I was then and sometimes visited friends in the city, we often amused ourselves by rubbing our feet on the carpet until we got ourselves so full of electricity that we could put up our fingers and light the gas. So I said to myself that if I could get full of electricity for the purpose of lightin' the gas I could get full of it for other purposes, and so, without losin' a moment, I set to work. I stood up on one of the seats, which was dry, and I rubbed the bottoms of my shoes backward and forward on it with such violence and swiftness that they pretty soon got warm and I began fillin' with electricity, and when I was fully charged with it from my toes to the top of my head I just sprang into the water and swam ashore. Of course I couldn't sink, bein' full of electricity."

Captain Bird heaved a long sigh and rose to his feet, whereupon the other mariners rose to their feet. "Madam," said Captain Bird, "what's to pay for the supper and—the rest of the entertainment?"

"The supper is twenty-five cents apiece," said the widow Ducket, "and everything else is free, gratis."

Whereupon each mariner put his hand into his trousers pocket, pulled out a silver quarter, and handed it to the widow. Then with four solemn "Good evenin's" they went out to the front gate.

"Cast off, Captain Jenkinson," said Captain Bird, "and you, Captain Burress, clew him up for'ard. You can stay in

the bow, Captain Sanderson, and take the sheet lines. I'll go aft."

All being ready, each of the elderly mariners clambered over a wheel, and having seated themselves, they prepared to lay their course for Cuppertown.

But just as they were about to start, Captain Jenkinson asked that they lay to a bit, and clambering down over his wheel, he re-entered the front gate and went up to the door of the house, where the widow and Dorcas were still standing.

"Madam," said he, "I just came back to ask what became of your brother-in-law through his wife's not bein' able to put no light in the window?"

"The storm drove him ashore on our side of the bay," said she, "and the next mornin' he came up to our house and I told him all that had happened to me; and when he took our boat and went home and told that story to his wife she just packed up and went out West, and got divorced from him; and it served him right, too."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Captain Jenkinson, and going out of the gate he clambered up over the wheel and the wagon cleared for Cuppertown.

When the elderly mariners were gone the widow Duckett, still standing in the door, turned to Dorcas.

"Think of it," she said—"to tell all that to me, in my own house! And after I had opened my one jar of brandied peaches that I'd been keepin' for special company!"

"In your own house!" ejaculated Dorcas. "And not one of them brandied peaches left!"

The widow jingled the four quarters in her hand before she slipped them into her pocket.

"Anyway, Dorcas," she remarked, "I think we can now say we are square with all the world, and so let's go in and wash the dishes."

"Yes," said Dorcas, "we're square."

THE ORGY



WALTER DE LA MARE

WALTER DE LA MARE originally made his name as a poet (his *Songs of Childhood* and *Peacock Pie* contain some of the most delightful lyrics in the language) but he has also written several novels and a large number of short stories in a vein of delicate fantasy which is inimitable.

THE ORGY

IT was a Wednesday morning, and May Day, and London, its West End too, crisp, brisk, scintillating. Even the horses had come out in their Sunday best. With their nosegays and ribbons and rosettes they might have been on their way to a wedding—the nuptials of Labour and Capital, perhaps. As for people, the wide pavements of the great street were packed with them. Not so many busy idlers of the one sex as of the other, of course, at this early hour—a top-hat here, a pearl-grey Homburg there; but of the feminine a host as eager and variegated as the butterflies in an Alpine valley in midsummer; some stepping daintily down from their landaulettes like “Painted Ladies” out of the chrysalis, and thousands of others, blues and browns and speckleds and sables and tawnies and high-fliers and maiden’s blushes, from all parts of the world and from most of the suburbs, edging and eddying along, this way, that way, their eyes goggling, their tongues clacking, but most of them, their backs to the highway, gazing, as though mesmerized, in and in through the beautiful plate-glass windows at the motley merchandise on the other side. And much of that on the limbs and trunks of beatific images almost as lifelike but a good deal less active than themselves.

The very heavens, so far as they could manage to peep under the blinds, seemed to be smiling at this plenty. Nor had they any need for care concerning the future, for nursemaids pushing their baby-carriages before them also paraded the pavements, their infant charges laid in dimpled sleep beneath silken awning and coverlet, while here and there a tiny tot chattered up into the air like a starling.

A clock, probably a church clock, and only just audible, struck eleven. The sun from its heights far up above the roof-tops blazed down upon the polished asphalt and walls with such an explosion of splendour that it looked as if

everything had been repainted overnight with a thin coat of crystalline varnish and then sprinkled with frozen sea-water. And every human creature within sight seemed to be as heart-free and gay as this beautiful weather promised to be brief. With one exception only—poor Philip Pim.

And why not? He was young—so young in looks, indeed, that if Adonis had been stepping along at his side they might have been taken for cousins. He was charmingly attired, too, from his little round hard felt hat—not unlike Mercury's usual wear, but without the wings—to his neat brogue shoes; and he was so blond, with his pink cheeks and flaxen hair, that at first you could scarcely distinguish his silken eyebrows and eyelashes, though they made up for it on a second glance. Care seemed never to have sat on those young temples. Philip looked as harmless as he was unharmed.

Alas, this without of his had no resemblance whatever to his within. He eyed vacantly a buzzing hive-like abandonment he could not share: first, because though he had the whole long day to himself he had no notion of what to do with it; and next, because only the previous afternoon the manager of the bank in which until then he had had a stool specially reserved for him every morning had shaken him by the hand and had wished him well—for ever. He had said how deeply he regretted Philip's services could not be indulged in by the bank any longer. He would miss him. Oh yes, very much indeed—but missed Philip must be.

The fact was that Philip had never been able to add up pounds, shillings, and pence so that he could be certain the total was correct. His 9's, too, often looked like 7's, his 5's like 3's. And as "simple addition" was all but his sole duty in the bank, he would not have adorned its premises for a week if his uncle, Colonel Crompton Pim, had not been acquainted with one of its most stylish directors, and was not in the habit of keeping a large part of his ample fortune in its charge. He had asked Mr. Bumbleton to give Philip a chance. But chances—some as rapidly as Manx cats—come to an end. And Philip's had.

Now, if Colonel Pim had sent his nephew when he was a small boy to a nice public school, he might have been able by this time to do simple sums very well indeed. Philip might have become an accurate adder-up. It is well to look on the bright side of things. Unfortunately, when Philip

was an infant, his health had not been very satisfactory—at least to his widowed mother—and he had been sent instead to a private academy. There a Mr. Browne was the mathematical master—a Mr. Browne so much attached to algebra and to reading *The Times* in school hours that he had not much patience with the rudiments of arithmetic. “Just add it up,” he would say, “and look up the answer. And if it isn’t right, do it again.”

It was imprudent of him, but in these early years poor Philip had never so much as dreamed that some day he was going to be a clerk on a stool. If he had, he might not perhaps have been so eager to look up the answers. But then, his uncle was fabulously rich and yet apparently unmarriageable, and Philip was his only nephew. Why, then, should he ever have paid any attention to banks, apart from the variety on which the wild thyme grows?

Term succeeded term, and still, though “a promising boy”, he remained backward—particularly in the last of the three R’s. And his holidays, so called, would be peppered with such problems as: (a) If a herring and a half cost three halfpence, how many would you get for a shilling? (b) If a brick weighs a pound and half a brick, how much does it weigh? (c) If Moses was the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, etc.; and (d) Uncles and brothers have I none, and so on. And since, after successive mornings with a sheet of foolscap and a stub of pencil, Philip’s answers would almost invariably reappear as (a) 18, (b) $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb., (c) his sister, and (d) himself, Colonel Pim grew more and more impatient and Nature had long ago given him a good start.

He had a way, too, when carpeting poor Philip, of flicking his shepherd-plaid trouser-leg with his handkerchief, which seemed useless to everyone concerned. And at last, instead of transferring his nephew from Mr. Browne to Christ Church, Oxford, or to Trinity College, Cambridge, or to some less delectable resort at an outlying university, he first (before setting out in pursuit of big game all around the world) consigned him to a tutor, who thanked his lucky stars the expedition would take the Colonel a long time; and, on his return, gave them both a prolonged vacation.

And *then* had fallen the bolt from the blue. On the morning of his twenty-first birthday, which had promised to be so cool, so calm, so bright, Philip received a letter from his

uncle. He opened it with joy ; he read it with consternation. It was in terms as curt as they looked illegible, and it was merely to tell him that what the Colonel called a post (but which was, in fact, a high stool) had been secured for his nephew, and that unless Philip managed to keep his seat on it for twelve consecutive months he would be cut off with a shilling.

Of these drear months about two and a half had somehow managed to melt away, and now not only was the stool rapidly following them into the limbo of the past, but at this very moment the Colonel was doubtless engaged, and with his usual zest, in keeping his promise. What wonder, then, Philip was not exactly a happy young man as he wandered this sunny populous May morning aimlessly on his way. There was nothing—apart from everything around him—to make him so, except only one minute stroke of luck that had befallen him before breakfast.

When he had risen from his tumbled bed in his London lodgings, the sight of his striped bank trousers and his black bank coat and waistcoat had filled him with disgust. Opening the grained cupboard which did duty for a wardrobe—and in the indulgence of his tailor it was pretty full—he took down from a peg the festive suit he was now wearing, but which otherwise he had left unheeded since Easter. He found himself faintly whistling as he buttoned it on ; but his delight can be imagined when, putting his finger and thumb into an upper waistcoat pocket, he discovered—a sovereign. And an excellent specimen of one, with St. George in his mantle and the dragon on the one side of it, and King Edward VII's head—cut off at the neck as if he had sat to its designer in his bath—on the other. This, with four others very much like it, had been bestowed on Philip many months ago by his Uncle Charles—a maternal uncle, who had since perished in Paris. As the rest of Philip's pockets contained only sevenpence-halfpenny in all, this coin—how forgotten, he simply could not conjecture—was treasure trove indeed.

Now, poor Philip had never really cared for money. Perhaps he had always associated it with herrings and half-bricks. Perhaps he had never needed it quite enough. Since, moreover, immediately opposite his perch at the bank there hung a framed antique picture of this commodity in process

of being shovelled out of receptacles closely resembling coal-scuttles into great vulgar heaps upon a polished counter, and there weighed in brass scales like so much lard or glucose, he had come to like it less and less. On the other hand, he dearly enjoyed spending it. As with Adam and the happy birds in the Garden of Eden—linnet and kestrel and wren—he enjoyed seeing it fly. In this he was the precise antithesis of his uncle.

Colonel Crompton Pim loved money. He exulted in it (not vocally, of course) *en masse*, as the Pharaohs exulted in pyramids. And he abhorred spending it. For this (and for many another) reason he had little affection for mere objects—apart, that is, from *such* objects as golf clubs, shooting-boots, or hippopotamus-hoof ink-stands, and he had not the smallest pleasure in buying anything for mere buying's sake.

His immense dormitory near Cheltenham, it is true, was full of furniture, but it was furniture, acquired in the 'sixties or thereabouts, for use and not for joy. Prodigious chairs with pigskin seats; tables of a solidity that defied time and of a wood that laughed at the worm; bedsteads of the Gog order; wardrobes resembling Assyrian sarcophagi; and ottomans which would seat with comfort and dignity a complete royal family. As for its "ornaments", they came chiefly from Benares.

And simply because poor Philip delighted in spending money and hated impedimenta such as these with the contempt a humming-bird feels for the corpse of a rhinoceros, he had never been able to take to his uncle—not even for the sake of what he owned. And it was impossible—as he fondly supposed—for any human being to take to him for any other reason. No, there was nothing in common between them, except a few branches of the family tree. And these the Colonel might already have converted into firewood.

Now, as poor Philip meandered listlessly along the street, fingering his Uncle Charles's golden sovereign in his pocket, he came on one of those gigantic edifices wherein you can purchase anything in the world—from a white elephant to a performing flea, from a cargo of coconuts to a tin-tack. This was the "store" at which his uncle "dealt". And by sheer force of habit, Philip mounted the welcoming flight of steps, crossed a large, flat rubber mat, and went inside.

Having thus got safely in, he at once began to ponder

how he was to get safely out—with any fraction, that is, of his golden sovereign still in his pocket. And he had realized in the recent small hours that with so little on earth now left to spend, except an indefinite amount of leisure, he must strive to spend that little with extreme deliberation.

So first, having breakfasted on a mere glance at the charred remnant of a kipper which his landlady had served up with his chicory, he entered a large gilded lift, or elevator, as the directors preferred to call it, en route to the restaurant. There he seated himself at a vacant table and asked the waitress to be so kind as to bring him a glass of milk and a bun. He nibbled, he sipped, and he watched the people—if people they really were, and not, as seemed more probable, automata intended to advertise the Ecclesiastical, the Sports, the Provincial, the Curlo, the Export, and the Cast-Iron Departments.

With his first sip of milk he all but made up his mind to buy a little parting present for his uncle. It would be at least a gentle gesture. With his second he decided that the Colonel would be even less pleased to receive a letter *and*, say, a velvet smoking-cap, or a pair of mother-of-pearl cuff-links, than just a letter. By the time he had finished his bun he had decided to buy a little something for himself. But try as he might he could think of nothing (for less than a guinea) that would be worthy of the shade of his beloved Uncle Charles. So having pushed seven-fifteenths of all else he possessed under his plate for his freckled waitress, with the remaining fourpence he settled his bill and went steadily downstairs. Nineteen minutes past ten—he would have a good look about him before he came to a decision.

Hunger, it has been said, sharpens the senses, but it is apt also to have an edgy effect upon the nerves. If, then, Philip's breakfast had been less exacting, or his lunch had made up for it, he might have spent the next few hours of this pleasant May morning as a young man should—in the open air. Or he might have visited the British Museum, or the National Gallery, or Westminster Abbey. He might never, at any rate, in one brief morning of his mortal existence have all but died again and again of terror, abandon, shame, rapture, and incredulity. He might never—but all in good time.

He was at a loose end, and it is then that habits are apt

to prevail. And of all his habits, Philip's favourite was that of ordering goods on behalf of his uncle. The Colonel in his fantastic handwriting would post him two weekly lists—one consisting of the "wanted", the other of complaints about the previous week's "supplied". Armed with these, Philip would set out for the building he was now actually in.

The first list, though not a thing of beauty, was a joy as long as it lasted. The second, for he had always flatly refused to repeat his uncle's sulphurous comments to any underling, he reserved for his old enemy, the secretary of the establishment, Sir Leopold Bull. And though in these weekly interviews Sir Leopold might boil with rage and chagrin, he never boiled over. For the name of Pim was a name of power in the secretary's office. The name of Pim was that of a heavy shareholder; and what the Colonel wanted he invariably in the long run got. A chest, say, of Ceylon tea, "rich, fruity, bright infusion"; a shooting-stick (extra heavy, Brugglesdon tube pattern); a quart-size tantalus, for a wedding present, with a double spring sterling silver Brahmin lock; a hundred-weight of sago; a stymie, perhaps, or a click—something of that sort.

These "order days" had been the balm of Philip's late existence. His eyes fixed on his ledger and his fancy on, say, "Saddlery" or "Sports", he looked forward to his Wednesdays like a thirsty Arab in the desert to an oasis of palms and a well of water. Indeed his chief regret at the bank, apart from little difficulties with his 9's and 3's, had been that his uncle's stores were closed on Saturday afternoons—and on Sundays. His hobby had, therefore, frequently given him indigestion, since he could indulge it only between 1 and 2 p.m. It was a pity, of course, that Colonel Pim was a man of wants so few, and those of so narrow a range. Possibly the suns of India had burned the rest out of him. But for Philip, any kind of vicarious purchase had been better than none. And now these delights, too, were for ever over. His fountain had run dry; Sir Leopold had triumphed.

At this moment he found himself straying into the Portmanteau and Bag Department. There is nothing like leather, and here there was nothing *but* leather, and all of it made up into articles ranging in size from trunks that would hold the remains of a Daniel Lambert to card-cases that would hold practically nothing at all. And all of a sudden Philip fancied

he would like to buy a cigarette-case. He would have preferred one of enamel or gold or morocco or tortoise-shell or lizard or shagreen; or even of silver or suède. But preferences are expensive. And as he sauntered on, his dreamy eye ranging the counters in search merely of a cigarette-case he could *buy*, his glance alighted on a "gent's dressing-case".

It was of pigskin, and it lay, unlike the central figure in Rembrandt's "Lesson in Anatomy", so that the whole of its interior was in full view, thus revealing a modest row of silver-topped bottles, similar receptacles for soap, tooth-brushes, hair-oil, and eau de Cologne; a shoe-horn, a boot-hook, an ivory paper-knife, and hair-brushes, "all complete". Philip mused on it for a moment or two, perplexed by a peculiar effervescence that was going on in his vitals. He then approached the counter and asked its price.

"The price, sir?" echoed the assistant, squinnying at the tiny oblong of pasteboard attached by a thread to the ring of the handle. "The price of that article is seventeen, seventeen, six."

He was a tubby little man with boot-button eyes, and his "pounds", Philip thought, was a trifle unctuous.

"Ah," he said, putting a bold face on the matter, "it looks a sound workaday bag. A little mediocre perhaps. Have you anything—less ordinary?"

"Something more expensive, sir? Why, yes, indeed. This is only a stock line—the 'Archdeacon' or 'County Solicitor' model. We have prices to suit all purses. Now if you were thinking of something which you might call res-shersy, sir"—and Philip now was—"there's a dressing-case under the window over there was specially made to the order of Haitch Haitch the Maharaja of Jolhopolloluli. Unfortunately, sir, the gentleman deceased suddenly a week or two ago; climate, I understand. His funeral obliquies were in the newspaper, you may remember. The consequence being, his ladies not, as you might say, concurring, the dressing-case in a manner of speaking is on our hands—and at a considerable reduction. Only six hundred and seventy-five guineas, sir; or rupees to match."

"May I look at it?" said Philip. "Colonel Crompton Pim."

"By all means, sir," cried the little man as if until that moment he had failed to notice that Philip was a long-lost

son. "Colonel Crompton Pim; of course. Here is the article, sir, a very handsome case, and quite unique, one of the finest, in fact, I have ever had the privilege of handling since I was transferred to this department—from the Sports, sir."

He pressed a tiny knob, the hinges yawned, and Philip's mouth began to water. It was in sober sooth a handsome dressing-case, and the shaft of sunlight that slanted in on it from the dusky window seemed pleased to be exploring it. It was a dressing-case of tooled red Levant morocco, with gold locks and clasps and a lining of vermilion watered silk, gilded with a chaste design of lotus flowers, peacocks, and houris, the fittings being of gold and tortoise-shell, and studded with so many minute brilliants and seed pearls that its contents, even in that rather dingy sunbeam, appeared to be delicately on fire.

Philip's light-blue eyes under their silken lashes continued to dwell on its charms in so spellbound a silence that for a moment the assistant thought the young man was about to swoon.

"Thank you very much," said Philip at last, turning away with infinite reluctance and with a movement as graceful as that of a fawn, or a *première danseuse* about to rest; "I will keep it in mind. You are sure the management can afford the reduction?"

Having made this rather airy comment, it seemed to Philip impolite, if not impossible, to ask the price of a "job line" of mock goatskin cigarette-cases that were piled up in dreary disorder on a tray near at hand. So he passed out into the next department, which happened to be that devoted to goods described as "fancy", though, so far as he could see, not very aptly.

Still, he glanced around him as he hurried on, his heart bleeding for the unfortunates, old and helpless, or young and defenceless, doomed some day to welcome these exacerbating barbarous jocosities as gifts. But at sight of an obscure, puffy, maroon object demonstratively labelled "Pochette: Art Nouveau", his very skin contracted, and he was all but about to inquire of a large, veiled old lady with an ebony walking-stick who was manfully pushing her way through this *mélange*, possibly in search of a *prie-dieu*, how such dreadful phenomena were "begot, how nourished", and was

himself preparing to join in the chorus, when a little beyond it his glance alighted on a minute writing-case, so frailly finished, so useless, so delicious to look at, handle, and smell, that even Titania herself might have paused to admire it. Philip eyed it with unconcealed gusto. His features had melted into the smile that so often used to visit them when as a little boy he had confided in his Uncle Charles that he preferred éclairs to doughnuts. Its price, he thought, was ridiculously moderate: only £67 10s.

"It's the *décor*, sir—Parisian, of course—that makes it a trifle costly," the assistant was explaining. "But it's practical as well as sheek and would add distinction to *any* young lady's boudoir, bed-chamber, or lap. The ink, as you see, sir, cannot possibly leak from the bottle, if the case, that is, is held the right way up—so. The pencil, the '*Sans Merci*', as you observe, is of solid gold; and the pen, though we cannot guarantee the nib, is set with life-size turquoises. The flaps will hold at least six sheets of small-size note-paper, and envelopes to—or not to—match. And *here* is a little something, a sort of calendar, sir, by which you can tell the day of the week of any day of the month in any year in any century from one A.D. to nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine. It could then be renewed."

"M'm, very ingenious," Philip murmured, "and even Leap Year, I see. Is it unique, and so on?"

"No doubt of it, sir. As a matter of fact, a lady from Philadelphia—the United States of America, sir—ordered fifty facsimilies, platinum mounts, of this very article—only yesterday afternoon; they get married a good deal over there, sir; wedding presents."

"Quite, thank you, no," said Philip, firmly but pleasantly. "They say there is safety in numbers, but there seems to be precious little else. Have you anything less reproducible?"

"Reproducible, sir? Why, naturally, sir. You see this is only a counter article. While catering for the many, sir, we are bound to keep an eye upon the few. For that very reason, the management prefer to have the costlier specimens under cover."

"Again, thank you," said Philip hurriedly. "What evils are done in thy name, O Philadelphia! I may return later."

He emerged from the Fancy-Goods Department, feeling

at the same moment crestfallen and curiously elated. His mind, in fact, at this moment resembled a volcano the instant before its gloom is fated to burst into a blazing eruption. Though very hazily, he even recognized the danger he was in. So in hope to compose himself he sat down for a minute or two on a Madeira wicker chair intended perhaps by the management for this very purpose, and found himself gazing at a large black Chinese cat, in the glossiest of glazed earthenware, and as lifelike as Oriental artifice could make it. It was seated in a corner under a high potted palm, and it wore a grin upon its features that may have come from Cheshire, but which showed no symptom whatever of vanishing away. At sight of it—for Philip was not only partial to cats but knew the virtues of the black variety—a secret fibre seemed to have snapped in his head. "Good luck!" the creature smirked at him. And Philip smirked back. A flame of anguished defiance and desire had leapt up in his body. He would show his uncle what was what. He would learn him to cut nephews off with shillings. He would dare and do and die!

He rose, refreshed and renewed. It was as if he had tossed off a bumper of "Veuve Clicquot" of 1066. He must himself have come over with the Conqueror. A shopwalker lurking near was interrupted in the middle of an enormous gape by the spectacle of this Apollonian young figure now entering his department—Planofortes and American Organs. There was something in the leopard-like look of him, something so princely and predatory in his tread, that this Mr. Jackson would have been almost ready to confess that he was moved. Frenchily dark and Frenchily sleek, he bowed himself almost double.

"Yes, sir?" he remarked out loud.

"I want, I think, a pianoforte," said Philip. "A Grand."

"Thank you, sir; this way, please. Grand pianofortes, Mr. Smithers."

"I want a Grand piano," repeated Philip to Mr. Smithers, an assistant with a slight cast in his left eye and an ample gingerish moustache. But in spite of these little handicaps Philip liked him much better than Mr. Jackson. A far-away glimpse of Mrs. Smithers and of all the little Smitherses seated round their Sunday leg of mutton at Hackney or at Brondesbury, maybe, had flashed into his mind.

"Grands, sir," cried Mr. Smithers, moving his moustache

up and down with a curious rotary constriction of the lips ;
"this way, please."

The young man was conducted along serried ranks of Grands. They stood on their three legs, their jaws tight-shut, as mute as troops on parade. Philip paced on and on, feeling very much like the Duke of Cambridge reviewing a regiment of his Guards. He paused at length in front of a "Style 8 ; 7 ft. 9 in., square-legged, blackwood, mahogany-trimmed Bismarck".

"It *looks* spacious," he smiled amiably. "But the finish ! And why overhung ?"

"Overstrung, sir ?" said Mr. Smithers. "That's merely a manner of speaking, sir, relating solely to its inside. But this, of course, is not what we specificate as a *grand* Grand. For tone and timber and resonance and pedal work and solidity and *wear*—there isn't a better on the market. I mean on the rest of the market. And if you were having in mind an everlasting instrument for the nursery or for a practice room—and we supply the new padded partitioning—this would be precisely the instrument, sir, you were having in mind. The young are sometimes a little hard on pianofortes, sir. They mean well, but they are but children after all ; and——"

"Now let—me—think," Philip interposed. "To be quite candid, I wasn't having anything of that sort in mind. My sentiments are England for the English ; and Bismarck, you know, though in girth and so on a remarkable man, was in other respects, a little—well, miscellaneous. It is said that he mixed his champagne with stout—or was it cocoa ? On the other hand, I have no wish to be insular, and I *may* order one of these constructions later. For a lady, the niece, as a matter of fact, of a governess of my uncle Colonel Crompton Pim's when he was young—as young at least as it was possible for him to be—who is, I believe, thinking of taking—of taking in—pupils. But we will see to that later. Have you anything that I could really look at ?"

Mr. Smithers's moustaches twirled like a weathercock. "Why, yes, sir. Just now we are up to our eyes in pianos—flooded ; and if I may venture to say so, sir, Bismarck was never no friend of *mine*. All this," and he swept his thumb in the direction of the avenue of instruments that stretched behind them, "they may be Grands, but they're most of them

foreign, and if you want a little something as nice to listen to as it is natty to look at, and *not* a mere menadjery fit only for an 'awl, there is a little what they call a harpsichord over yonder, sir. It's a bijou model, de Pompadour case, hand-painted throughout—cupids and scallops and what-not, all English gut, wire, metal, and jacks, and I defy any dealer in London to approximate it, sir, in what you might call pure form. No noise and all music, sir, and that *mellow* you scarcely knew where to look. A lady's instrument—a titled lady's. And only seven hundred and seventy-seven guineas, sir, all told."

"Is it unique?" Philip inquired.

"Unique, sir? There's not another like it in Europe."

Philip smiled at Mr. Smithers very kindly out of his blue eyes. "But what about America?" he said.

The assistant curved what seemed an almost unnecessarily large hand round his lips. "Between you and me, sir, if by America," he murmured, "you're meaning the United States, why, Messrs. Montferas & de Beauguyou refuse to ship in that direction. It ruins their tone. In fact, sir, they are what's called *difficult*. They make for nobody and nowhere but as a favour; and that instrument over there was built for . . ."

He whispered the sesame so low that water rustling on a pebbled beach would have conveyed to Philip tidings more intelligible. But by the look in Mr. Smithers's eye Philip guessed that the lady in question moved in a lofty, though possibly a narrow, circle.

"Ah," he said; "then that settles it. A home away from home. Charity begins there. I shall want it tomorrow. I shall want them both tomorrow. I mean the pianos. And perhaps a more democratic instrument for the servants' hall. But I will leave that to you."

Mr. Smithers pretended not to goggle. "Why, yes, sir, that can be easily arranged. In London, I *bo*—con-jecture?"

"In London," said Philip. "Grosvenor Square." For at that very instant, as if at the summons of a jinnee, there had wafted itself into his memory the image of a vacant and "highly desirable residence" which his casual eye had glanced upon only the afternoon before, and which had proclaimed itself "to be let".

"Grosvenor Square, sir; oh yes, sir," Mr. Smithers was

ejaculating, order-book in hand. "I will arrange for their removal at once. The three of them—quite a nice little set, sir."

"Pim, Crompton, Colonel," chanted Philip. "R-O-M; deferred account; *thank* you. 4-4-4, yes, four hundred and forty-four, Grosvenor Square. I am—that is, *we* are furnishing there."

But his gentle emphasis on the "we" was so courtly in effect that it sounded more like an afterthought than a piece of information. Nevertheless it misled Mr. Smithers. Intense fellow-feeling beamed from under his slightly overhung forehead. "And I am sure, sir, if I may make so bold, I wish you both every happiness. I am myself of a matrimonial turn. And regret it, sir? *Never*! I always say if every——"

"That's very kind indeed of you," said Philip, averting his young cheek, which having flushed had now turned a little pale. "And, if I may be so bold, I am perfectly certain Mrs. Smithers is of the same way of thinking. Which is the best way to the Best Man's Department, if I take in Portmanteaux and the Fancies on my way?"

Mr. Smithers eyed him with the sublimest admiration. "Straight through, sir, on the left beyond them Chappels. On the same floor, but right out on the farther side of the building. As far as you can go."

"That is exactly what I was beginning to wonder—precisely how far I can go. This little venture of mine is a rather novel experience, and at the moment I am uncertain of its issue. But tell me, why is it our enterprising American friends have not yet invented a *lateral* lift?"

"Now that's passing strange, too, sir; for I've often fancied it myself," said Mr. Smithers. "But you see in a department like this there's not much time for quiet thought, sir, with so much what you might call hidden din about. As a matter of fact, when I was younger, sir—and that happens to us all—I did invent a harmonium key-stifler—rubber and pith and wool—*so*—and a small steel spring, quite neat and entirely unnoticeable. But the manufacturers wouldn't look at it; not they!"

"I don't believe," said Philip, folding up his bill, "they ever look at anything. Not closely, you know. But if ever I do buy a harmonium"—he put his head a little on one side

and again smiled at Mr. Smithers—"I shall insist on the stifler. I suppose," he added reflectively, "you haven't by any chance a nice pedigree Amati or Stradivarius in stock? I have a little weakness for fiddles."

Mr. Smithers, leaning heavily on the counter on both his thumbs, smiled, but at the same time almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"I fancied it was unlikely," said Philip. "What's that over there; in the glass case, I mean?"

"That, sir?" said Mr. Smithers, twinkling up. "In that glass case there? That's a harp, sir. And a lovely little piece *that* is. Child's size, sir. What they call minnychoore, and well over a century old, but still as sweet as a canary. It was made, so they say, for Mozart, the composer, sir, as you might be aware, in 1781, and up in the top corner is scratched the letters A. W. No doubt of it, sir—A. W. I've seen a picture of the mite myself playing like a nangel in his nightcap, and not a day over seven; you'd hardly believe it, and his parents coming in at the door. Surprising. Then Schumann, *he* had it, sir—I mean the harp; and Schumann, though I don't know how he could dissuade himself to part with it, *he* passed it on to Brahms, another composer—and very much thought of even though a bit nearer *our* day. But you'll find it all neatly set out on the brass label at the foot. It's all there, sir. There's many a custo——"

"Indeed!" said Philip. "Brahms, Schumann, Mozart, what scenes we are recalling! And here it rests at last. The knacker's yard. How very, very sad. Why, of course, Mr. Smithers, we must have that sent on too—and packed very, very carefully. Is the glass case extra?"

Mr. Smithers gulped. "I am exceedingly sorry, sir," he said, "exceedingly sorry, but it's not for sale; I mean—*except* the case."

"Not for sale," retorted Philip impulsively. "But what is the use, Mr. Smithers, of a mercenary institution like this unless everything in it is for sale? You cannot mean for *raw* advertisement?"

Mr. Smithers was covered with confusion. "I am sure, sir," he said, "that the directors would do their utmost to consider your wishes. They would be very happy to do so. But if you will excuse my mentioning it, I should myself very much miss that harp. I have been in this department

thirteen years now. . . . My little boy . . . It is the only thing . . ."

It was Philip's turn to be all in confusion. "Good gracious me, I quite understand," he said; "not another word, Mr. Smithers. I wouldn't *think* of pressing the point. None the less, I can assure you that even if it had been for sale I should always have welcomed you whenever you cared to come to Grosvenor Square and take another look at it. And, of course, your little boy too—*all* your little boys."

Mr. Smithers appeared to be lost in gratitude. "If only," he began, a light that never was on sea or land in his eye—but words failed him.

At the other end of the Chappels, Philip again encountered the walker, Mr. Jackson, still looking as much like a self-possessed bridegroom as it is possible for a high collar and a barber to achieve.

"I see," said Philip, "you exhibit specimens of the tubophone (and, by the way, I would suggest *a* instead of *er*), the tubaphone, the clogbox, and the Bombaboo, iniquities at the same time negroid and old-fashioned; but though in a recent visit to Budapest I found even the charming little linden-shaded shops—along the Uffel-gang, you know, not, of course, a fashionable part of the city—crammed with models of the 'Haba-Stein', a microtonic instrument with five key-boards and Hindu effects, intended, of course, for the polytonal decompositions of the 'Nothing-but-Music' school—*most* interesting—I see *no* trace of it here. I am not a neoteromaniac, but still, we must keep abreast, we must keep abreast!"

He waved a not unfriendly glove over his head, smiled, and went on.

Mr. Smithers had also watched the slim, grey, young figure until it had turned the corner and was out of sight. He then had a word with his floor chief.

"Pim, eh, Crompton," said Mr. Jackson, squinting morosely at his underling's open order-book. "Setting up house? Then I suppose the old gent must have sent in his checks. Not that I'm surprised this nephew of his hasn't bought his black yet. Close-fisted, purple-nosed, peppery old ——! There won't be many to cry their eyes out over *his* arums and gardenias."

Mr. Smithers, being a family man, felt obliged to

seem to enjoy as much as possible his immediate chief's society.

"All I can say *is*," he ventured, "that young feller, and he's a gentleman if ever there was one, is making it fly."

He *was*. At this moment Philip was assuring Assistant No. 6 in the Portmanteau Department that unless the Maharaja of Jolhopolloluli's dressing-case could be dispatched next day to reach No. 444 Grosvenor Square by tea-time he need not trouble. "A few other little things," he explained, "are being sent at the same time." No. 6 at once hastened to the house telephone and asked for the secretary's office. The line was engaged.

But he need not have hesitated, for when a young man with a Pim for an uncle and of so much suavity and resource makes his wishes known, this world is amiability itself. Philip was warming up. However bland in outward appearance, he was by this time at a very enlivening temperature. He had tasted blood, as the saying goes; and he was beginning to see the need of setting a good example. Customers, like the coneys, are usually a feeble folk. His little sortie was turning into a crusade.

By this time he had all but finished disporting himself in the Furniture Department. "Three large reception-rooms, one of them extensive," had run his rather naked catalogue, "a ball-room, a dining-room, a breakfast-room, and a little pretty dumpy all-kinds-of-angles morning-room with a Cherubini ceiling and a Venetian chimney-piece, eighteenth century, in lapis lazuli and glass. Bedrooms, let me see, say, twenty-two—just to go on with (but not in), eleven of them for personal use, and the rest staff. That, I think, will do for the present. We face east or west as the case may be; and nothing, please, of the 'decorative', the quaint, or the latest thing out. Nothing shoddy, shapeless, or sham. I dislike the stuffy and the fussy and mere trimmings; and let the beds be *beds*. Moreover, I confess to being sadly disappointed in the old, the 'antique', furniture, you have shown me. The choice is restricted, naïve and incongruous, and I have looked in vain for anything that could not be easily rivalled in the richer museums. However, let there be as many so-called antique pieces as possible, and those as antique as you can manage. Period, origin, design, harmony—please bear these in mind."

The assistants, clustering around him, bowed.

"If I have time I will look through the department again on my way home. Seven hundred guineas for the cheaper of the Chippendale four-posters seems a little exorbitant; and three hundred and fifty for the William and Mary wall-glass—I fear it's been resilvered and patched. Still, I agree you can but do your best—I say you can all of you but do your best—and I must put up with that. What I *must* insist on, however, is that everything I have mentioned—everything—must be in its place tomorrow afternoon—carpets and so on will, of course, precede them—by four o'clock. And let there be no trace left of that indescribable odour of straw and wrappings—from Delhi, I should think—which accompanies removals. 444 Grosvenor Square. Pim—Crompton—Colonel: R-O-M. Thank you. To the left? *Thank you.*"

This floor chief hastened on in front of his visitor as if he were a Gehazi in attendance on a Naaman, and the young man presently found himself in a scene overwhelmingly rich with the colours, if not the perfumes, of the Orient. Here a complete quarter of an hour slid blissfully by. Mere wooden furniture, even when adorned with gilt, lacquer, ivory, or alabaster, can be disposed of with moderate ease; and especially if the stock of the tolerable is quickly exhausted. But Persian, Chinese, if not Turkey, carpets are another matter.

Philip sat erect on a gimcrack gilded chair, his cane and hat in his left hand, his gloves in his right, while no less than three sturdy attendants in baize aprons at one and the same moment strewed their matchless offerings at his feet, and an infuriated and rapidly multiplying group of would-be customers in search of floorcloth, lino, and coconut matting stood fuming beyond. But "first come first served" is a good old maxim, and even apart from it Philip was unaware of their company. He lifted not so much as an eyebrow in their direction.

In the meantime, however, the cash balance in his uncle's bank, and much else besides, had long since as rapidly vanished as the vapour from a locomotive on a hot summer's day. From the Carpet Department, vexed that time allowed him only one of London's chief treasuries to ransack—such are the glories of Bokhara and Ispahan—he hastened down to the wine counters. Here, childishly confident in the

cellarage of No. 444, Philip indulged in a pretty palate *not* inherited from his uncle; claret, Burgundy, hock, sherry, cherry brandy, green Chartreuse, and similar delicate aids to good talk and reflection. He was ingenuous but enthusiastic. Port he ignored.

From "Wines" he made his way through the galleries exhibiting curtains and "hangings" (he shuddered), and china and glass—"most discouraging". His spirits revived a little when yet another defunct and barbaric prince, this time from Abyssinia, supplied him in the Car Department with a vehicle whose only adequate use, to judge from the modesty of its dashboard, the simplicity of its engine, and its price, would be a journey from this world into the next. Nevertheless His Highness had left it behind.

Fleeting visits to counters bristling with ironmongery, turnery, kitchen utensils, and provisions—and from motives of principle he omitted all mention of mulligatawny paste, chutney, West India pickles, and similar fierce and barbarous comestibles—vanished out of memory like the patterns of a kaleidoscope. The rather noisy annexe reserved for live stock Philip left unvisited. After deserts of dead stock it sounded inviting, but Philip's was a dainty nose and he was sorry for orang-outangs.

So too with books. He had clear convictions of what a gentleman's library should be without, but decided that it would take more leisure than he could spare this morning to expound them. Even the sight of a Work of Reference, however, is an excellent sedative; he ordered the choicest of who's-whos, dictionaries, atlases, encyclopaedias, bird, flower, and cookery books—with a copy of "Bradshaw"—and retired.

As for pictures and statuary, one anguished glance into the dreadful chambers devoted to the fine arts had sent him scurrying on like a March hare. Nor, as he rather sadly realized, had he any cause to linger at the portals of the Monumental-Masonry Department, and he now suddenly found himself in the midst of a coruscating blaze of the precious metals and the still more precious stones. He had strayed into "Jewellery"—a feast for Aladdin. Gold in particular—goblets and bowls and tankards, plates, platters, and dishes of it; clocks, chronometers, watches—from massive turnips, memorial of the Georges, to midgets like a

threepenny piece in crystal and enamel, many of them buzzing like bees, and all of them intent on the kind of time which is *not* wild or always nectarous, but of which Philip had always supposed there was an inexhaustible supply. But not, alas, for all purposes. Indeed, these officious reminders of the actual hour had for the first time a little scared him.

In the peculiar atmosphere that hangs over any abundant array of sago, cooked meats, candles, biscuits, coffee, tea, ginger, and similar wares, he had been merely a young bachelor on the brink of an establishment. But at sight of this otiose display of gew-gaws in the lamplit mansion in which he now found himself, his fancy had suddenly provided him with a bride. She was of fairness incomparably fair. The first faint hint of this eventuality had almost unnerved him. He lost his head and—his heart being unconcerned—his taste also. In tones as languid as the breezes of Arabia he had at once ordered her rings, bracelets, necklaces, pendants, brooches, ear-rings, not to speak of bediamonded plumes and tiaras, that would daunt the dreams even of the complete bevy of musical-comedy young ladies on the British stage—not to mention those of Buenos Aires. And then, oddly enough, he had come to himself, and paused.

At the very moment of opening his mouth in repetition of a solo with which he was now entirely familiar—"R-O-M," and so on—he sat instead, gaping at the tall, calm, bald, venerable old gentleman on the other side of the counter. He had flushed.

"Have you," he inquired almost timidly at last, his eyes fixed on a chastely printed list of cutlery and silverware that lay on the glass case at his elbow, "have you just one really simple, lovely, rare, precious, and—well—unique little trinket suitable for a lady? Young, you know? An *un*-birthday present?"

The old gentleman looked up, looked at, looked *in*, smiled fondly, feminiscently, and, selecting a minute key on a ring which he had drawn out of his pocket, opened a safe not half a dozen yards away. "We have this," he said.

"This", at first, was a little fat morocco-leather case. He pressed the spring. Its lid flew open. And for an instant Philip went gravel blind. But it was not so much the suppressed lustre of the jewels within that had dazed his imagination as the delicate marvel of their setting! They

lay like lambent dewdrops on the petals of a flower. The old gentleman gazed too.

"The meaning of the word 'simple,'" he suggested ruminatively, "is one of many degrees. This, sir, is a Benvenuto Cellini piece." He had almost whispered the last few syllables as if what in workmanship were past all rivalry was also beyond any mortal pocket; as if, in fact, he were telling secrets of the unattainable. The tone piqued Philip a little.

"It is charming," he said. "But have you nothing then of Jacques de la Tocqueville's, or of Rudolph von Himmel-dommer's, nothing of—dear me, the name escapes me! The earlier Florentine, you will remember, no doubt referred to in *Sordello*, who designed the chryselephantine bowl for the Botticelli wedding-feast. But never mind. Nothing Greek? Nothing Etruscan—*poudre d'or*? Are you suggesting that the Winter Palace was thrice looted in vain?"

The old gentleman was accustomed to the airs and graces of fastidious clients and merely smiled. He had not been listening very intently. "You will appreciate the difficulty, sir, of keeping anything but our more trifling pieces actually within reach of the nearest burglar with a stick of gun-cotton or an acetylene lamp. This"—he stirred the little leather case with his finger as lightly as a cat the relics of a mouse, and its contents seemed softly to sizzle in subdued flames of rose and amber and blue—"this," he said, "happens not to be our property. It is merely in our keeping. And though to an article of such a nature it is absurd to put a price, we have been asked to dispose of it; and by—well, a client for whom we have the profoundest respect."

"I see"; Philip pondered coldly on the bauble, though his heart was a whirlpool of desire and admiration. He swallowed. The remote tiny piping of a bird that was neither nightingale nor skylark, and yet might be either or both, had called to him as if from the shores of some paradisaal isle hidden in the mists of the future. He glanced up at the old gentleman, but his bald, long, grey countenance was as impassive as ever.

"I'll take it," Philip said, and for a while could say no more. When speech was restored to him, he asked that it should be delivered not "with the other things", and not to any butler or major-domo or other crustacean that might

appear in answer to a knock at No. 444, but by special messenger into his own personal, private hands.

"Precisely at half past four, if you please." The old gentleman bowed. As there was not enough room in the money column of his order-book for the noughts, he had written in the price in long hand, and was engaged in printing the figures 444 in the place reserved for the customer's address, when a small but clearly actual little voice at Philip's elbow suddenly shrilled up into his ear :

"Mr. Philip Pim, sir?" Philip stood stock-still, stiffened, his heart in his ears. "The sekkertary, sir," the piping voice piped on, "asks me to say he'd be much obliged if you would be so kind as to step along into his office on your way *hout*, sir."

The tone of this invitation, though a little Cockney in effect, was innocence and courtesy itself; yet at sound of it every drop of blood in Philip's body—though he was by no means a bloated creature—had instantly congealed. This was the end, then. His orgy was over. His morning of mornings was done. The afflatus that had wafted him on from floor to floor had wisped out of his mind like the smoke of a snuffed-out candle. Yet *still* the bright thought shook him: he had had a Run for his money. No—better than that: he had had a Run *gratis*.

He must collect his wits: they had gone wool-gathering. At last he managed to turn his head and look down at the small, apple-cheeked, maroon-tunicked page-boy at his side—apple-cheeked, alas, only because he had but that week entered the sekkertary's service and his parents were of country stock.

"Tell Sir Leopold Bull"—Philip smiled at the infant—"that I will endeavour to be with him in the course of the afternoon. Thank you. That," he added for the ear of his friend on the other side of the counter, "will be all."

But Philip was reluctant to leave him. These four syllables, as he had heard himself uttering them, sounded on in his ear with the finality of a knell. He was extremely dubious of what would happen if he let go of the counter. His knees shook under him. A dizzy vacancy enveloped him in. With a faint wan smile at the old gentleman, who was too busily engaged in returning his treasures to the safe to notice it, he managed to edge away at last.

Every mortal thing around him, gilded ceiling to grandfather clock, was at this moment swaying and rotating, as will the ocean in the eyes of a sea-sick traveller gloating down upon it from an upper deck. He felt ill with foreboding.

But breeding tells. And courage is a mistress that has never been known to jilt a faithful heart. Philip was reminded of this as he suddenly caught sight of a sort of enormous purple beefeater, resembling in stature a Prussian dragoon, and in appearance a Javanese Jimjam. This figure stood on duty in the doorway, and appeared to be examining him as closely as if he were the heir to the English throne (or the most nefarious crook from Chicago). As Philip drew near he looked this monster full in his fish-like eye, since he was unable to do anything else. But try as he might he could not pass him in silence.

"Ask Sir Leopold Bull, please," he said, "to send an official to show me the way to his office. He will find me somewhere in the building."

"I can take you there meself," replied the giant hoarsely. He could indeed—bodily.

"Thank you," replied Philip. "I have no doubt of it. But I should be much obliged if you would at once deliver my message."

He then groped his way to yet another wicker chair not many yards along a corridor festooned with knick-knacks from Japan and the Near East, and clearly intended for speedy disposal. He eyed them with immense distaste, and sat down.

"Nothing whatever, thank you," he murmured to a waitress who had approached him with a card containing a list of soft drinks. Never in his life had he so signally realized the joys of self-restraint. And though at the same moment he thrust finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket in search of his Uncle Charles's last sovereign, it was with a view not to material but to moral support. Years before he had often tried the same device when as a small boy deadly afraid of the dark he had managed at last to thrust his fevered head up and out from under his bed-clothes, and to emit a dreadful simulacrum of a croupy cough. He had never known it to fail of effect, and it was always nice to know his mother was *there*.

So, too, with his Uncle Charles's sovereign. It was nice to know it was there, though it was not the dark Philip was

now afraid of, but the light. Resting the ivory handle of his walking-stick on his lower lip, he began to think. What would his sentence be? A first offender, but not exactly a novice. Not, at any rate, he hoped, in taste and judgment. Months or years? Hard labour or penal servitude? So swift is the imagination that in a few seconds Philip found himself not only—his sentence served, the smiling governor bidden farewell—*out* and a free man again, but fuming with rage that he had not managed to retain a single specimen of his spoils. The Jobbli dressing-bag, for instance, or that tiny, that utterly and inimitably “unique”, little Sheraton Sheridan writing-desk.

He came back a little stronger from this expedition into the future. For reassurance, like hope, springs eternal in the human breast. His one regret was not so much that he had been found out (that might come later), but that he had been found out so soon. How much bolder, less humiliating, nobler, to have actually bearded that old “curmudger” of an uncle of his, swapp or bogie in hand, in his den!

That in any event he would have been “found out” on the morrow, as soon, that is, as the first van arrived at No. 444, he had realized long ago. He certainly would not have been found “in”! But even one brief night in May seems, in prospect, a long interval between being a Croesus and a felon in Maidstone Jail.

He was recalled from these reflections by a young man whose sleek black hair was parted as neatly in front and in the middle as his morning coat was parted behind. A few paces distant, like a mass of gilded pudding-stone, stood the giant from the Jewellery Department. Were they in collusion? Philip could not decide.

“If you would step this way, sir, to the secretary’s office,” said the young man, “Sir Leopold Bull would be very much obliged.”

Philip mounted to his feet and, though he flatly refused to step *that* way, followed him—to his doom. That, however, was not to be instantaneous, for on his arrival Sir Leopold Bull, rising from his roll-top desk with a brief but thrilling smile, first proffered a plump white hand to his visitor and then a chair. It seemed to be a needlessly polite preamble to the interview that was to follow. Philip ignored the hand but took the chair.

"Thank you," he said. "I do hope you will some day take my advice, Sir Leopold, to *simplify* the arrangement of this building. It is a perfect labyrinth, and I always miss my way." With a sigh he sank down into the cushions. He was tired.

"My uncle, Colonel Crompton Pim," he continued, "is unable to spare a moment to see you this morning. I regret to say he strongly disapproved of the Bombay ducks—or was it the Clam Chaowder?—you sent him on Friday. They were beneath contempt."

Sir Leopold smiled once more, but even more placatingly. "I had the privilege of seeing Colonel Crompton Pim only yesterday afternoon," he replied. "He then expressed his satisfaction, for the time being, at the golf-balls—the new *Excelsior* brand—with one of which we had the pleasure of supplying him *gratis* a week or two ago. The Bombay ducks shall be withdrawn immediately. I must apologize for not seeking you out in person, Mr. Pim, but what I have to say is somewhat of a private nature, and——"

"Yes," said Philip, realizing how thin was the edge of the wedge which Sir Leopold was at this moment insinuating into the matter in hand. "Yes, quite." And he opened his innocent blue eyes as wide as he could, to prevent them from blinking. He kept them fixed, too, on the close-shaven face, its octopus-like mouth and prominent eyes, with ill-suppressed repulsion. To be a fly that had fallen a victim to such a spider as this!

"It would please me better," he went on, "if you would arrive as rapidly as possible at the matter you wish to discuss with me. I am free for five minutes, but I must beg you not to waste my time. And please tell your porter over there to go away. Scenes are distasteful to me."

The face of the porter, who seemed to have been created solely for his bulk, turned as crimson as a specimen of *sang-du-bauf*. He appeared to be hurt at having been described as a "scene". But wages are of more importance than feelings, and he withdrew.

"You have had a busy morning, Mr. Pim," said the secretary. "No less than seven of my assistants who have had the privilege of waiting upon you have been monopolizing me for some time with telephone messages. I hope I am not being too intrusive if I venture to congratulate

you, sir, on what I suppose to be Colonel Crompton Pim's approaching——"

"Candidly, Sir Leopold," said Philip firmly, "that *would* be venturing too far. Much too far. Let us say no more about it. What precise charge are you intending to bring against me?"

There was a pause while the world continued to rotate.

"For which article?" breathed Sir Leopold.

Philip gazed steadily at the full, bland, secretive countenance. It was as if once again he had heard that seraphic bird-like voice sounding in the remote blue sky above the storm-clouds that now hung so heavily over his beating heart.

"Oh, I mean for delivery," he said. "Mine was—was a large order."

"But, my dear sir, we shouldn't dream of making *any* such charge. *Any* service to Colonel Pim . . ." The faint sob in his voice would have done credit to Caruso.

Philip stooped to hide the cataract of relief that had swept over his face, then raised his head again. How could he be sure that this was anything more than play-acting—the torture of suspense? "Ah, well," he said, "that is no matter now. I gather there was some other point you had in mind—in *view*, I should say."

"Oh, only," said Sir Leopold, "to ask if Colonel Pim would be so kind as to subscribe as usual to our Fund for the Amelioration of the Conditions of the Offspring of Superannuated Shop Assistants. Mainly orphans, Mr. Pim. We must all die, Mr. Pim, and some of us have to die earlier in life than others. Still, our average here is little worse than that of any other large London establishment. In Petrograd—or was it Los Angeles?—I am given to understand, a shop assistant at two-and-thirty is a shop assistant with at least one foot in the grave. It is the little orphans, the fatherless ones, who, from no apparent fault of their own, have to be left to the tender mercies of a busy world! It would grieve you, sir—which heaven forbid—if I told you how many of these wee small things there are now on our hands. Chubby, joysome, rosebud little creatures, as happy as the day is long. Nevertheless it is a little thoughtless to marry, Mr. Pim, when it is only orphans one can leave behind one. On the other hand, there is a silver lining to *every* cloud.

Without these infants we should be deprived of a good cause. An excellent cause. And it's causes that keep us going. Last year I think Colonel Pim very kindly contributed half a guinea."

"In cash?" Philip inquired sharply.

"We debited his account," said Sir Leopold.

"Well, then," said Philip, "please understand that my uncle *regrets* that little laxity. He has hardened. He now entirely disapproves of orphans and of orphanages. The shop assistant, he was saying to me only the other day, is a person who should be grateful to Providence that he has *no* justification for dabbling in matrimony. The more celibate they are, in his opinion, the better. But recollect, Sir Leopold, that until we arrive at the higher and fewer salaried officials in your establishment, I feel myself in no way bound to *share* my uncle's views. Your staff is as courteous and considerate as it appears to be unappreciated. A man's a man for a' that. And a' that. Let us talk of brighter things."

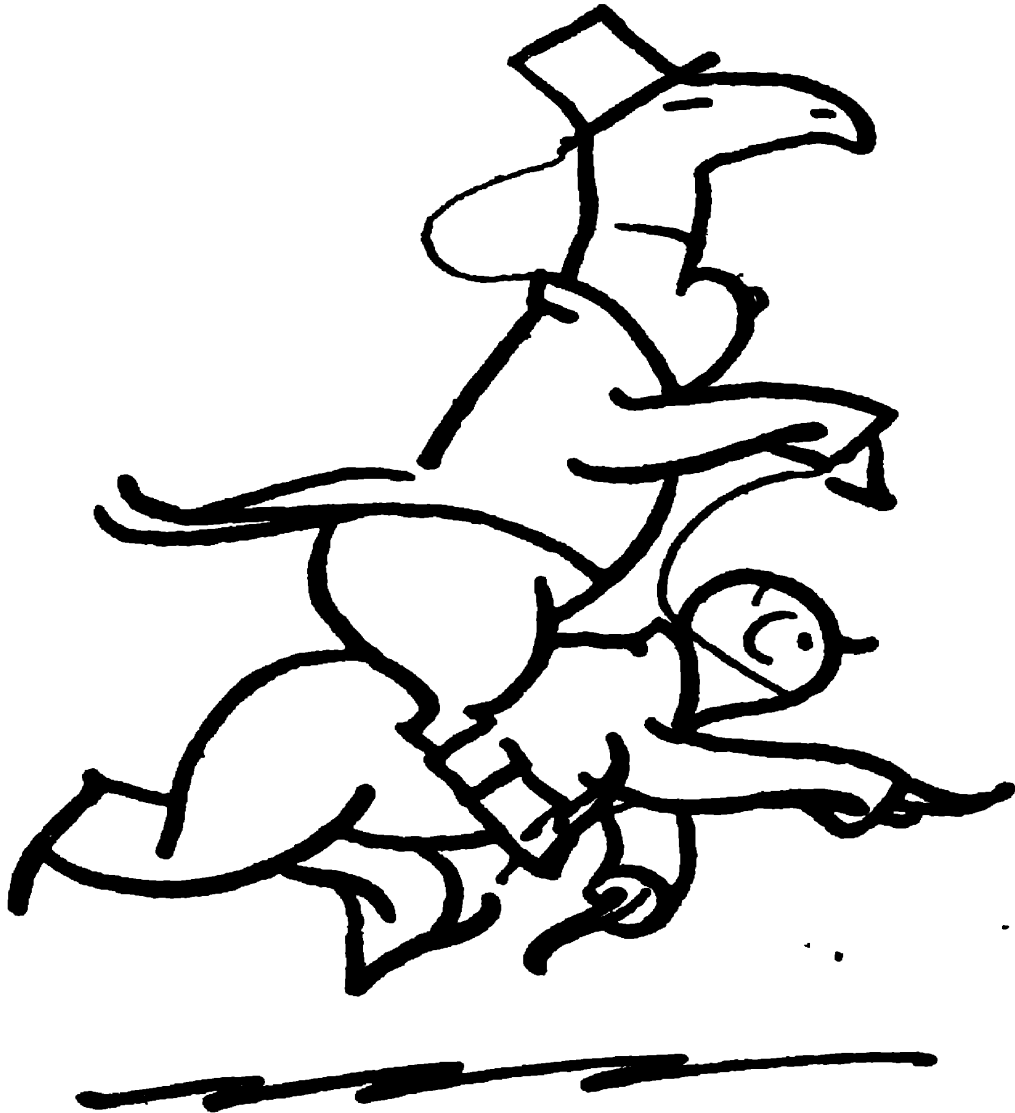
Sir Leopold did his utmost to conceal the wound to his vanity. "I am sorry to seem to be persistent," he assured his client, "but Colonel Pim only yesterday was so kind as to say he would *consider* my appeal. I take it, then, that he has changed his mind?"

"My uncle," retorted Philip tartly, "has a mind that is the better for being changed." For an instant he saw the face before him as it would appear in due course in the witness-box; and his very soul revolted. That pitiless Machine called Society might have its merits, but not *this* cog in its wheel! "I myself implored my uncle," he added bitterly, "to give the orphans the cold shoulder. What in the chronic sirocco of his next world would be the use to him of a mere half-guinea's worth of cooling breezes? Scarcely a sop in the pan. Indeed, only a passion for the conventional prevented him from asking for his previous donations to be returned."

Sir Leopold appeared to be engaged in rapidly bolting something—possibly his pride. It was at any rate not part of his secretarial duties to detect insanity in the family of any solvent shareholder.

"There is only one other little point," he went on rather hollowly. "Colonel Pim asked me to send him a detailed

THE TALKING HORSE



F. ANSTEY

THE TALKING HORSE

IT was on the way to Sandown Park that I met him first, on that horribly wet July afternoon when Bendigo won the Eclipse Stakes. He sat opposite to me in the train going down, and my attention was first attracted to him by the marked contrast between his appearance and his attire : he had not thought fit to adopt the regulation costume for such occasions, and I think I never saw a man who had made himself more aggressively horsey. The mark of the beast was sprinkled over his linen ; he wore snaffle sleeve-links, a hard hunting-hat, a Newmarket coat, and extremely tight trousers. And with all this he fell as far short of the genuine sportsman as any stage super who ever wore his spurs upside down in a hunting chorus. His expression was mild and inoffensive, and his watery pale eyes and receding chin gave one the idea that he was hardly to be trusted astride anything more spirited than a gold-headed cane. And yet, somehow, he aroused compassion rather than any sense of the ludicrous : he had the look of shrinking self-effacement which comes of a recent humiliation, and, in spite of all extravagances, he was obviously a gentleman ; while something in his manner indicated that his natural tendency would, once at all events, have been to avoid any kind of extremes.

He puzzled and interested me so much that I did my best to enter into conversation with him, only to be baffled by the jerky embarrassment with which he met all advances ; and when we got out at Esher, curiosity led me to keep him still in view.

Evidently he had not come with any intention of making money. He avoided the grand stand, with the bookmakers huddling in couples, like hoarse lovebirds ; he kept away from the Members' Enclosure, where the Guards band was endeavouring to defy the elements which emptied their vials into the brazen instruments ; he drifted listlessly about the course

till the clearing-bell rang, and it seemed to me as if he was searching for someone whom he only wished to discover in order to avoid.

Sandown, it must be admitted, was not as gay as usual that day, with its "deluged park" and "unsummer'd sky", its waterproofed toilettes and massed umbrellas, whose sides gleamed livid as they caught the light—but there was a general determination to ignore the unseasonable dampness as far as possible, and an excitement over the main event of the day which no downpour could quench.

The Ten Thousand was run: ladies with marvellously confected bonnets lowered their umbrellas without a murmur, and smart men on drags shook hands effusively as, amidst a frantic roar of delight, Bendigo strode past the post. The moment after, I looked round for my incongruous stranger, and saw him engaged in a well-meant attempt to press a currant bun upon a carriage-horse tethered to one of the trees—a feat of abstraction which, at such a time, was only surpassed by that of Archimedes at the Sack of Syracuse.

After that I could no longer control my curiosity—I felt I must speak to him again, and I made an opportunity later, as we stood alone on a stand which commanded the finish of one of the shorter courses, by suggesting that he should share my umbrella.

Before accepting he glanced suspiciously at me through the rills that streamed from his unprotected hat-brim. "I'm afraid," I said, "it is rather like shutting the stable-door after the steed is stolen."

He started. "He *was* stolen, then," he cried. "So you have heard?"

I explained that I had only used an old proverb which I thought might appeal to him, and he sighed heavily.

"I was misled for the moment," he said. "You have guessed, then, that I have been accustomed to horses?"

"You have hardly made any great secret of it."

"The fact is," he said, instantly understanding this allusion to his costume, "I—I put on these things so as not to lose the habit of riding altogether—I have not been on horseback lately. At one time I used to ride constantly—constantly. I was a regular attendant in Rotten Row—until something occurred which shook my nerve, and I am only waiting now for the shock to subside."

I did not like to ask any questions, and we walked back to the station, and travelled up to Waterloo in company, without any further reference to the subject.

As we were parting, however, he said, "I wonder if you would care to hear my full story some day? I cannot help thinking it would interest you, and it would be a relief to me."

I was ready enough to hear whatever he chose to tell me, and persuaded him to dine with me at my rooms that evening, and unbosom himself afterwards, which he did to an extent for which I confess I was unprepared.

That he himself implicitly believed in his own story, I could not doubt; and he told it throughout with the oddest mixture of vanity and modesty, and an obvious struggle between a dim perception of his own absurdity and the determination to spare himself in no single particular, which, though it did not overcome my scepticism, could not fail to enlist sympathy. But for all that, by the time he entered upon the more sensational part of his case, I was driven to form conclusions respecting it which, as they will probably force themselves upon the reader's own mind, I need not anticipate here.

I give the story, as far as possible, in the words of its author; and have only to add that it would never have been published here without his full consent and approval.

My name (said he) is Gustavus Pulvertoft. I have no occupation, and six hundred a year. I lived a quiet and contented bachelor until I was twenty-eight, and then I met Diana Chetwynd for the first time. We were spending Christmas at the same country-house, and it did not take me long to become the most devoted of her many adorers. She was one of the most variously accomplished girls I had ever met. She was a skilled musician, a brilliant amateur actress; she could give most men thirty out of a hundred at billiards, and her judgment and daring across the most difficult country had won her the warm admiration of all hunting-men. And she was neither fast nor horsey, seeming to find but little pleasure in the society of mere sportsmen, to whose conversation she infinitely preferred that of persons who, like myself, were rather agreeable than athletic. I was not at that time, whatever I may be now, without my share of good looks, and for some reason it pleased Miss Chetwynd to show me a

degree of favour which she accorded to no other members of the house-party.

It was annoying to feel that my unfamiliarity with the open-air sports in which she delighted debarred me from her company to so great an extent; for it often happened that I scarcely saw her until the evening, when I sometimes had the bliss of sitting next to her at dinner; but on these occasions I could not help seeing that she found some pleasure in my society.

I don't think I have mentioned that, besides being exquisitely lovely, Diana was an heiress, and it was not without a sense of my own presumption that I allowed myself to entertain the hope of winning her at some future day. Still, I was not absolutely penniless, and she was her own mistress, and I had some cause, as I have said, for believing that she was, at least, not ill-disposed towards me. It seemed a favourable sign, for instance, when she asked me one day why it was I never rode. I replied that I had not ridden for years—though I did not add that the exact number of those years was twenty-eight.

"Oh, but you must take it up again!" she said, with the prettiest air of imperiousness. "You ought to ride in the Row next season."

"If I did," I said, "would you let me ride with you sometimes?"

"We should meet, of course," she said; "and it is such a pity not to keep up your riding—you lose so much by not doing so."

Was I wrong in taking this as an intimation that, by following her advice, I should not lose my reward? If you had seen her face as she spoke, you would have thought as I did then—as I do now.

And so, with this incentive, I overcame any private misgivings, and soon after my return to town attended a fashionable riding-school near Hyde Park, with the fixed determination to acquire the whole art and mystery of horsemanship.

That I found learning a pleasure I cannot conscientiously declare. I have passed happier hours than those I spent in cantering round four bare whitewashed walls on a snorting horse, with my interdicted stirrups crossed upon the saddle. The riding-master informed me from time to time that I was getting on, and I knew instinctively when I was coming off; but I must have made some progress, for my instructor became

more encouraging. "Why, when you come here first, Mr. Pulvertoft, sir, you were like a pair of tongs on a wall, as they say ; whereas now—well, you can tell yourself how you are," he would say ; though, even then, I occasionally had reason to regret that I was *not* on a wall. However, I persevered, inspired by the thought that each fresh horse I crossed (and some were very fresh indeed) represented one more barrier surmounted between myself and Diana, and encouraged by the discovery, after repeated experiments, that tan was rather soothing to fall upon than otherwise.

When I walked in the Row, where a few horsemen were performing as harbingers of spring, I criticized their riding, which I thought indifferent, as they neglected nearly all the rules. I began to anticipate a day when I should exhibit a purer and more classic style of equestrianism. And one morning I saw Diana, who pulled up her dancing mare to ask me if I had remembered her advice, and I felt proudly able to reply that I should certainly make my appearance in the Row before very long.

From that day I was perpetually questioning my riding-master as to when he considered I should be ripe enough for Rotten Row. He was dubious, but not actually dissuasive. "It's like this, you see, sir," he explained, "if you get hold of a quiet, steady horse—why, you won't come to no harm ; but if you go out on an animal that will take advantage of you, Mr. Pulvertoft, why, you'll be all no-how on him, sir."

They would have mounted me at the school ; but I knew most of the stud there, and none of them quite came up to my ideal of a "quiet, steady horse" ; so I went to a neighbouring job-master, from whom I had occasionally hired a brougham, and asked to be shown an animal he could recommend to one who had not had much practice lately. He admitted candidly enough that most of his horses "took a deal of riding", but added that it so happened that he had one just then which would suit me "down to the ground"—a phrase which grated unpleasantly on my nerves, though I consented to see the horse. His aspect impressed me most favourably. He was a chestnut of noble proportions, with a hogged mane ; but what reassured me was the expression of his eye, indicating as it did a self-respect and sagacity which one would hardly expect for seven-and-sixpence an hour.

"You won't get a showier Park 'ack than what he is,

not to be so quiet," said the owner. "He's what you may call a kind 'oss, and as gentle—you could ride him on a packthread."

I considered reins safer, but I was powerfully drawn towards the horse; he seemed to me sensible that he had a character to lose, and to possess too high an intelligence wilfully to forfeit his testimonials. With hardly a second thought, I engaged him for the following afternoon.

I mounted at the stables, with just a passing qualm, perhaps, while my stirrup-leathers were being adjusted, and a little awkwardness in taking up my reins, which were more twisted than I could have wished; however, at length I found myself embarked on the stream of traffic on the back of the chestnut—whose name, by the way, was Brutus.

Shall I ever forget the pride and ecstasy of finding that I had my steed under perfect control, that we threaded the maze of carriages with absolute security? I turned him into the Park, and clucked my tongue: he broke into a canter, and how shall I describe my delight at the discovery that it was not uncomfortable? I said, "Woa," and he stopped so gradually that my equilibrium was not seriously disturbed; he trotted, and still I accommodated myself to his movements without any positive inconvenience. I could have embraced him for gratitude: never before had I been upon a beast whose paces were so easy, whose behaviour was so considerate. I could ride at last! or, which amounted to the same thing, I could ride the horse I was on, and I would "use no other". I was about to meet Diana Chetwynd, and need not fear even to encounter her critical eyes.

We had crossed the Serpentine Bridge, and were just turning in upon the Ride, when—and here I am only too conscious that what I am about to say may strike you as almost incredible—when I heard an unfamiliar voice addressing me with, "I say—you!" and the moment afterwards realized that it proceeded from my own horse!

I am not ashamed to own that I was as nearly off as possible; for a more practised rider than I could pretend to be might have a difficulty in preserving his equanimity in this all but unparalleled situation. I was too much engaged in feeling for my left stirrup to make any reply, and presently the horse spoke once more. "I say," he inquired, and I failed to discern the slightest trace of respect in his tone—"do you think you can ride?" You can judge for yourself how disconcerting

the inquiry must have been from such lips. I felt rooted to the saddle—a sensation which, with me, was sufficiently rare. I looked round in helpless bewilderment, at the shimmering Serpentine, and the white houses in Park Lane gleaming out of a lilac haze, at the cocoa-coloured Row, and the flash of distant carriage-wheels in the sunlight : all looked as usual—and yet, there was I on the back of a horse which had just inquired “whether I thought I could ride” !

“I have had two dozen lessons at a riding-school,” I said at last, with rather a flabby dignity.

“I should hardly have suspected it,” was his brutal retort. “You are evidently one of the hopeless cases.”

I was deeply hurt, the more so because I could not deny that he had some claim to be a judge. “I—I thought we were getting on so nicely together,” I faltered, and all he said in reply was, “*Did you ?*”

“Do you know,” I began, striving to be conversational, “I was never on a horse that talked before.”

“You are enough to make any horse talk,” he answered ; “but I suppose I *am* an exception.”

“I think you must be,” said I. “The only horses I ever heard of possessing the gift of speech were the Houyhnhnms.”

“How do you know I am not one of them ?” he replied.

“If you are, you will understand that I took the liberty of mounting you under a very pardonable mistake ; and if you will have the goodness to stand still, I will no longer detain you.”

“Not so fast,” said he : “I want to know something more about you first. I should say, now, you were a man with plenty of oats.”

“I am—well off,” I said. How I wished I was !

“I have long been looking out for a proprietor who would not overwork me : now, of course, I don’t know, but you scarcely strike me as a *hard* rider.”

“I do not think I could be fairly accused of that,” I answered, with all the consciousness of innocence.

“Just so—then buy me.”

“No,” I gasped : “after the extremely candid opinion you were good enough to express of my riding, I’m surprised that you should even suggest such a thing.”

“Oh, I will put up with that—you will suit me well enough, I dare say.”

"You must excuse me. I prefer to keep my spare cash for worthier objects ; and, with your permission, I will spend the remainder of the afternoon on foot."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said he.

"If you won't stop and let me get off properly," I said, with firmness, "I shall *roll* off." There were some promenaders within easy hail ; but how was I to word a call for help, how explain such a dilemma as mine ?

"You will only reduce me to the painful necessity of rolling on you," he replied. "You must see that you are to a certain extent in my power. Suppose it occurred to me to leap those rails and take you into the Serpentine, or to run away and upset a mounted policeman with you—do you think you could offer much opposition ?"

I could not honestly assert that I did. "You were introduced to me," I said reproachfully, "as a *kind* horse !"

"And so I am—apart from matters of business. Come, will you buy, or be bolted with ? I hate indecision !"

"Buy !" I said, with commercial promptness. "If you will take me back, I will arrange about it at once."

It is needless to say that my own idea was to get safely off his back : after which, neither honour nor law could require me to execute a contract extorted from me by threats. But, as we were going down the mews, he said reflectively, "I've been thinking—it will be better for all parties if you make your offer to my proprietor *before* you dismount." I was too vexed to speak : this animal's infernal intelligence had foreseen my manœuvre—he meant to foil it, if he could.

And then we clattered in under the glass-roofed yard of the livery stables ; and the job-master, who was alone there, cast his eyes up at the sickly-faced clock as if he were comparing its pallor with my own. "Why, you *are* home early, sir," he said. "You didn't find the 'orse too much for you, did you ?" He said this without any suspicion of the real truth ; and, indeed, I may say, once for all, that this weird horse—Houyhnhnm, or whatever else he might be—admitted no one but myself into the secret of his marvellous gifts, and in all his conversations with me, managed (though how, I cannot pretend to say) to avoid being overheard.

"Oh, dear no," I protested, "he carried me admirably—admirably !" and I made an attempt to slip off.

No such thing: Brutus instantly jogged my memory, and me, by the slightest suggestion of a "buck".

"He's a grand 'orse, sir, isn't he?" said the job-master complacently.

"M—magnificent!" I agreed, with a jerk. "Will you go to his head, please?"

But the horse backed into the centre of the yard, where he plunged with a quiet obstinacy. "I like him so much," I called out, as I clung to the saddle, "that I want to know if you're at all inclined to part with him?" Here Brutus became calm and attentive.

"Would you be inclined to make me an offer for him, sir?"

"Yes," I said faintly. "About how much would he be?"

"You step into my office here, sir," said he, "and we'll talk it over."

I should have been only too willing, for there was no room there for the horse; but the suspicious animal would not hear of it; he began to revolve immediately.

"Let us settle it now—here," I said. "I can't wait."

The job-master stroked away a grin. No doubt there *was* something unbusinesslike and unpractical in such precipitation, especially as combined with my appearance at the time.

"Well, you *'ave* took a violent fancy to the 'orse and no mistake, sir," he remarked.

"I never crossed a handsomer creature," I said; which was hardly a prudent remark for an intending purchaser, but then, there was the animal himself to be conciliated.

"I don't know, really, as I can do without him just at this time of year," said the man. "I'm under'orsed as it is for the work I've got to do."

A sweet relief stole over me: I had done all that could be expected of me. "I'm very sorry to hear that," I said, preparing to dismount. "That *is* a disappointment; but if you can't there's an end of it."

"Don't you be afraid," said Brutus. "*He'll* sell me readily enough: make him an offer, quick!"

"I'll give you thirty guineas for him, come!" I said, knowing well enough that he would not take twice the money.

"I thought a gentleman like you would have had more

insight into the value of a 'orse," he said. "Why, his action alone is worth that, sir."

"You couldn't let me have the action without the horse, I suppose?" I said, and I must have intended some joke.

It is unnecessary to prolong a painful scene. Brutus ran me up steadily from sum to sum, until his owner said at last: "Well, we won't 'aggle, sir, call it a hundred."

I had to call it a hundred, and what is more it *was* a hundred. I took him without a warranty, without even a veterinary opinion. I could have been induced to take my purchase away then and there, as if I had been buying a canary, so unaccustomed was I to transactions of this kind, and I am afraid the job-master considered me little better than a fool.

So I found myself the involuntary possessor of a Houyhnhmn, or something even worse, and I walked back to my rooms in Park Street in a state of stupor. What was I to do with him? To ride an animal so brutally plainspoken would be a continual penance; and yet I should have to keep him, for I knew he was cunning enough to outwit any attempt to dispose of him. And to this, Love and Ambition had led me! I could not, after all I had said, approach Diana with any confidence as a mere pedestrian: the fact that I was in possession of a healthy horse which I never rode would be sure to leak out in time, and how was I to account for it? I could see no way, and I groaned under an embarrassment which I dared not confide to the friendliest ear. I hated the monster that had saddled himself upon me, and looked in vain for any mode of escape.

I had to provide Brutus with stabling in another part of the town, for he proved exceedingly difficult to please: he found fault with everything, and I only wonder he did not demand that his stable should be fitted up with blue china and mezzotints. In his new quarters I left him for some days to his own devices: a course which I was glad to find, on visiting him again, had considerably reduced his arrogance. He wanted to go into the Row and see the other horses, and it did not at all meet his views to be exercised there by a stableman at unfashionable hours. So he proposed a compromise. If I would only consent to mount him, he engaged to treat me with forbearance, and pointed out that he could give me, as he expressed it, various "tips" which would improve my seat. I was not blind to the advantages of such an arrangement.

It is not everyone who secures a riding-master in the person of his own horse ; the horse is essentially a generous animal, and I felt that I might trust to Brutus's honour. And, to do him justice, he observed the compact with strict good faith. Some of his "tips", it is true, very nearly tipped me off, but their result was to bring us closer together ; our relations were less strained ; it seemed to me that I gained more mastery over him every day, and was less stiff afterwards.

But I was not allowed to enjoy this illusion long. One day when I innocently asked him if he found my hands improving, he turned upon me his off sardonic eye. "You'll *never* improve, old sack-of-beans" (for he had come to address me with a freedom I burned to resent). "Hands ! Why, you're sawing my mouth off all the time. And your feet 'home', and tickling me under my shoulders at every stride—why, I'm half ashamed to be seen about with you."

I was deeply hurt. "I will spare you for the future," I said coldly ; "this is my last appearance."

"Nonsense !" he said. "You needn't show temper over it. Surely, if I can put up with it, *you* can ! But we will make a new compact." (I never knew such a beast as he was for bargains !) "You only worry me by interfering with the reins. Let 'em out, and leave everything to me. Just mention from time to time where you want to go, and I'll attend to it—if I've nothing better to do."

I felt that such an understanding was destructive of all dignity, subverting, as it did, the natural relations between horse and rider ; but I had hardly any self-respect left, and I consented, since I saw no way of refusing. And on the whole, I cannot say, even now, that I had any grave reason for finding fault with the use Brutus made of my concessions ; he showed more tact than I could have expected in disguising the merely nominal nature of my authority.

I had only one serious complaint against him, which was that he had a habit of breaking suddenly away, with a merely formal apology, to exchange equine civilities with some cob or mare to whose owner I was a perfect stranger, thus driving me to invent the most desperate excuses to cover my seeming intrusion : but I managed to account for it in various ways, and even made a few acquaintances in this irregular and involuntary manner. I could have wished he had been a less susceptible animal, for, though his flirtations were merely

platonie, it is rather humiliating to have to play "gooseberry" to one's own horse—a part which I was constantly being called upon to perform !

As it happened, Diana was away in Paris that Easter, and we had not met since my appearance in the Row ; but I knew she would be in town again shortly, and with consummate diplomacy I began to excite Brutus's curiosity by sundry careless, half-slighting allusions to Miss Chetwynd's little mare, Wild Rose. "She's too frisky for my taste," I said, "but she's been a good deal admired, though I dare say you wouldn't be particularly struck by her."

So that, on the first afternoon of Diana's return to the Row, I found it easy, under cover of giving Brutus an opportunity of forming an opinion, to prevail on him to carry me to her side. Diana, who was with a certain Lady Verney, her chaperon, welcomed me with a charming smile.

"I had no idea you could ride so well," she said, "you manage that beautiful horse of yours so very easily—with such light hands, too."

This was not irony, for I could now give my whole mind to my seat ; and, as I never interfered at all with the steering apparatus, my hands must have seemed the perfection of lightness.

"He wants delicate handling," I answered carelessly, "but he goes very well with *me*."

"I wish you would let me try his paces some morning, Pulvertoft," struck in a Colonel Cockshott, who was riding with them, and whom I knew slightly : "I've a notion he would go better on the curb."

"I shall be very happy," I began, when, just in time, I noticed a warning depression in Brutus's ears. The Colonel rode about sixteen stone, and with spurs ! "I mean," I added hastily, "I should have been—only, to tell you the truth, I couldn't conscientiously trust anyone on him but myself."

"My dear fellow !" said the Colonel, who I could see was offended. "I've not met many horses in my time that I couldn't get upon terms with."

"I think Mr. Pulvertoft is *quite* right," said Diana. "When a horse gets accustomed to one he does so resent a strange hand : it spoils his temper for days. I never will lend Wild Rose to anybody for that very reason."

The Colonel fell back in the rear in a decided sulk. "Poor

dear Colonel Cockshott !” said Diana. “He is so proud of his riding, but I think he dragoons a horse. I don’t call that *riding*, do you ?”

“Well—hardly,” I agreed, with easy disparagement. “I never believe in ruling a horse by fear.”

“I suppose you are very fond of yours ?” she said.

“Fond is not the word !” I exclaimed—and it certainly was not.

“I am not sure that what I said about lending Wild Rose would apply to *you*,” she said. “I think you would be gentle with her.”

I was certain that I should treat her with all consideration ; but as I doubted whether she would wholly reciprocate it, I said with much presence of mind that I should regard riding her as akin to profanation.

As Brutus and I were going home, he observed that it was a good thing I had not agreed to lend him to the Colonel.

“Yes,” I said, determined to improve the occasion, “you might not have found him as considerate as—well, as some people !”

“I meant it was a good thing for *you* !” he hinted darkly, and I did not care to ask for an explanation. “What did you mean,” he resumed, “by saying that I should not admire Wild Rose ? Why, she is charming—charming !”

“In that case,” I said, “I don’t mind riding with her mistress occasionally—to oblige you.”

“You don’t mind !” he said. “You will *have* to, my boy—and every afternoon !”

I suppressed a chuckle : after all, man *is* the nobler animal. I could manage a horse—in my own way. My little ruse had succeeded : I should have no more forced introductions to mystified strangers.

And now for some weeks my life passed in a happy dream. I only lived for those hours in the Row where Brutus turned as naturally to Wild Rose as the sunflower to the sun, and Diana and I grew more intimate every day. Happiness and security made me almost witty. I was merciless in my raillery of the eccentric exhibitions of horsemanship which were to be met with, and Diana was provoked by my comments to the sweetest silvery laughter. As for Colonel Cockshott, whom I had once suspected of a desire to be my rival, he had long become a “negligible quantity” ; and if I delayed in asking

Diana to trust me with her sweet self, it was only because I found an epicurean pleasure in prolonging a suspense that was so little uncertain.

And then, without warning, my riding was interrupted for a while. Brutus was discovered, much to his annoyance, to have a saddle-raw, and was even so unjust as to lay the blame on me, though, for my own part, I thought it a mark of apt, though tardy, retribution. I was not disposed to tempt Fortune upon any other mount, but I could not keep away from the Row, nevertheless, and appeared there on foot. I saw Diana riding with the Colonel, who seemed to think his opportunity had come at last; but whenever she passed the railings on which I leaned, she would raise her eyebrows and draw her mouth down into a little curve of resigned boredom which completely reassured me. Still, I was very glad when Brutus was well again and we were cantering down the Row once more, both in the highest spirits.

"I never heard the horses here *whinny* so much as they do this season," I said, by way of making conversation. "Can you account for it at all?" For he sometimes gave me pieces of information which enabled me to impress Diana afterwards by my intimate knowledge of horses.

"Whinnying?" he said. "They're *laughing*, that's what they're doing—and no wonder!"

"Oh!" said I. "And what's the joke?"

"Why, *you* are!" he replied. "You don't suppose you take *them* in, do you? They know all about you, bless your heart!"

"Oh, do they?" I said blankly. This brute took a positive pleasure, I believe, in reducing my self-esteem.

"I dare say it has got about through Wild Rose," he continued. "She was immensely tickled when I told her. I'm afraid she must have been feeling rather dull all these days, by the by."

I felt an unworthy impulse to take his conceit down as he had lowered mine.

"Not so very, I think," I said. "She seemed to me to find that brown hunter of Colonel Cockshott's a very agreeable substitute."

Late as it is for reparation, I must acknowledge with shame that in uttering this insinuation, I did that poor little mare (for whom I entertained the highest respect) a shameful injustice; and I should like to state here, in the most solemn

and emphatic manner, my sincere belief that, from first to last, she conducted herself in a manner that should have shielded her from all calumny.

It was only a mean desire to retaliate, a petty and ignoble spite, that prompted me thus to poison Brutus's confidence, and I regretted the words as soon as I had uttered them.

"That beast !" he said, starting as if I had touched him with a whip—a thing I never used. "Why, he hasn't two ideas in his great fiddle-head. The only sort of officer *he* ought to carry is a Salvationist !"

"I grant he has not your personal advantages and charm of manner," I said. "No doubt I was wrong to say anything about it."

"No," he said, "you—you have done me a service"; and he relapsed into a sombre silence.

I was riding with Diana as usual, and was about to express my delight at being able to resume our companionship when her mare drew slightly ahead and lashed out suddenly, catching me on the left leg, and causing intense agony for the moment.

Diana showed the sweetest concern, imploring me to go home in a cab at once, while her groom took charge of Brutus. I declined the cab ; but, as my leg was really painful, and Brutus was showing an impatience I dared not disregard, I had to leave her side.

On our way home, Brutus said moodily, "It is all over between us—you saw that ?"

"I felt it !" I replied. "She nearly broke my leg."

"It was intended for me," he said. "It was her way of signifying that we had better be strangers for the future. I taxed her with her faithlessness ; she denied it, of course—every mare does ; we had an explanation, and everything is at an end !"

I did not ride him again for some days, and when I did, I found him steeped in Byronic gloom. He even wanted at first to keep entirely on the Bayswater side of the Park, though I succeeded in arguing him out of such weakness. "Be a horse !" I said. "Show her you don't care. You only flatter her by betraying your feelings."

This was a subtlety that had evidently not occurred to him, but he was intelligent enough to feel the force of what I said. "You are right," he admitted ; "you are not quite a fool in some respects. She shall see how little I care !"

Naturally, after this, I expected to accompany Diana as usual, and it was a bitter disappointment to me to find that Brutus would not hear of doing so. He had an old acquaintance in the Park, a dapple-grey, who, probably from some early disappointment, was a confirmed cynic, and whose society he thought would be congenial just then. The grey was ridden regularly by a certain Miss Gittens, whose appearance as she tittupped laboriously up and down had often furnished Diana and myself with amusement.

And now, in spite of all my efforts, Brutus made straight to the grey. I was not in such difficulties as might have been expected, for I happened to know Miss Gittens slightly, as a lady no longer in the bloom of youth, who still retained a wiry form of girlishness. Though rather disliking her than not, I found it necessary just then to throw some slight effusion into my greeting. She, not unnaturally perhaps, was flattered by my preference, and begged me to give her a little instruction in riding, which—heaven forgive me for it!—I took upon myself to do.

Even now I scarcely see how I could have acted otherwise : I could not leave her side until Brutus had exhausted the pleasures of cynicism with his grey friend, and the time had to be filled up somehow. But, oh, the torture of seeing Diana at a distance, and knowing that only a miserable misunderstanding between our respective steeds kept us apart, feeling constrained even to avoid looking in her direction lest she should summon me to her side !

One day, as I was riding with Miss Gittens, she glanced coyly at me over her sharp right shoulder, and said, "Do you know, only such a little while ago I never even dreamed that we should ever become as intimate as we are now ; it seems almost incredible, does it not ?"

"You must not say so," I replied. "Surely there is nothing singular in my helping you a little with your riding ?" Though it struck me that it would have been very singular if I had.

"Perhaps not singular," she murmured, looking modestly down her nose ; "but will you think me very unmaidenly if I confess that, to me, those lessons have developed a dawning danger ?"

"You are perfectly safe on the grey," I said.

"I—I was not thinking of the grey," she returned. "Dear Mr. Pulvertoft, I must speak frankly—a girl has so many

things to consider, and I am afraid you have made me forget how wrongly and thoughtlessly I have been behaving of late. I cannot help suspecting that you must have some motive in seeking my society in so—so marked a manner."

"Miss Gittens," said I, "I can disguise nothing : I have."

"And you have not been merely amusing yourself all this time?"

"Before heaven," I cried with fervour, "I have *not*!"

"You are not one of those false men who give their bridle-reins a shake, and ride off with 'Adieu for evermore!'—tell me you are not?"

I might shake *my* bridle-reins till I was tired and nothing would come of it unless Brutus was in the humour to depart ; so that I was able to assure her with truth that I was not at all that kind of person.

"Then why not let your heart speak?"

"There is such a thing," I said gloomily, "as a heart that is gagged."

"Can no word, no hint of mine loosen the gag?" she wished to know. "What, you are silent still? Then, Mr. Pulvertoft, though I may seem harsh and cruel in saying it, our pleasant intercourse must end—we must ride together no more!"

No more? What would Brutus say to that? I was horrified. "Miss Gittens," I said in great agitation, "I entreat you to unsay those words. I—I am afraid I could not undertake to accept such a dismissal. Surely, after that, you will not insist!"

She sighed. "I am a weak, foolish girl," she said; "you are only too able to overcome my judgment." Then, Mr. Pulvertoft, look happy again—I relent. You may stay if you will."

You must believe that I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself, for I could not be blind to the encouragement which, though I sought to confine my words to strict truth, I was innocently affording. But, with a horse like mine, what was a man to do? What would you have done yourself? As soon as was prudent, I hinted to Brutus that his confidences had lasted long enough; and as he trotted away with me, he remarked, "I thought you were never going." Was he weary of the grey already? My heart leaped. "Brutus," I said thickly, "are you strong enough to bear a great joy?"

"Speak out," he said, "and do try to keep those heels out of my ribs."

"I cannot see you suffer," I told him, with a sense of my own hypocrisy all the time. "I must tell you—circumstances have come to my knowledge which lead me to believe that we have both judged Wild Rose too hastily. I am sure that her heart is yours still. She is only longing to tell you that she has never really swerved from her allegiance."

"It is too late now," he said, and the back of his head looked inflexibly obstinate; "we have kept apart too long."

"No," I said, "listen. I take more interest in you than you are, perhaps, aware of, and I have thought of a little plan for bringing you together again. What if I find an opportunity to see the lady she belongs to—we have not met lately, as you know, and I do not pretend that I desire a renewal of our intimacy——"

"You like the one on the grey best; I saw that long ago," he said; and I left him in his error.

"In any case, for your sake I will sacrifice myself," I said magnanimously. "I will begin tomorrow. Come, you will not let your lives be wrecked by a foolish lovers' quarrel?"

He made a little half-hearted opposition, but finally, as I knew he would, consented. I had gained my point: I was free from Miss Gittens at last!

That evening I met Diana in the hall of a house in Eaton Square. She was going downstairs as I was making my way to the ball-room, and greeted me with a rather cool little nod.

"You have quite deserted me lately," she said, smiling, but I could read the reproach in her eyes. "You never ride with us now."

My throat was swelling with passionate eloquence—and I could not get any of it out.

"No, I never do," was all my stupid tongue could find to say.

"You have discovered a more congenial companion," said cruel Diana.

"Miss Chetwynd," I said eagerly, "you don't know how I have been wishing——! Will you let me ride with you tomorrow, as—as you used to do?"

"You are quite sure you won't be afraid of my naughty Wild Rose?" she said. "I have given her such a scolding, that I think she is thoroughly ashamed of herself."

"You thought it was *that* that kept me!" I cried. "Oh, if I could tell you!"

She smiled: she was my dear, friendly Diana again.

"You shall tell me all about it tomorrow," she said. "You will not have another opportunity, because we are going to Aix on Friday. And now, good night. I am stopping the way, and the linkman is getting quite excited over it."

She passed on, and the carriage rolled away with her, and I was too happy to mind very much—had she not forgiven me? Should we not meet tomorrow? I should have two whole hours to declare myself in, and this time I would dally with Fortune no longer.

How excited I was the following day! How fearful, when the morning broke grey and lowering! How grateful, when the benignant sun shone out later, and promised a brilliant afternoon! How careful I dressed, and what a price I paid for the flower for my buttonhole!

So we cantered on to the Row, as goodly a couple (if I may be pardoned this retrospective vanity) as any there; and by and by, I saw, with the quick eye of a lover, Diana's willowy form in the distance. She was not alone, but I knew that the Colonel would soon have to yield his place to me.

As soon as she saw me, she urged her mare to a trot, and came towards me with the loveliest faint blush and dawning smile of welcome, when, all at once, Brutus came to a dead stop, which nearly threw me on his neck, and stood quivering in every limb.

"Do you see that?" he said hoarsely. "And I was about to forgive her!"

I saw: my insinuation, baseless enough at the beginning, was now but too well justified. Colonel Cockshott was on his raw-boned brown hunter, and even my brief acquaintance with horses enabled me to see that Wild Rose no longer regarded him with her former indifference.

Diana and the Colonel had reigned up and seemed waiting for me—would Brutus never move? "Show your pride," I said in an agonized whisper. "Treat her with the contempt she deserves."

"I will," he said between his bit and clenched teeth.

And then Miss Gittens came bumping by on the grey, and, before I could interfere, my Houyhnhnm was off like a shot in pursuit. I saw Diana's sweet, surprised face; I heard

the Colonel's jarring laugh as I passed, and I—I could only bow in mortified appeal, and long for a gulf to leap into like Curtius!

"I don't know what I said to Miss Gittens. I believe I made myself recklessly amiable, and I remember she lingered over parting in a horrible emotional manner. I was too miserable to mind: all the time I was seeing Diana's astonished eyes, hearing Colonel Cockshott's heartless laugh. Brutus made a kind of explanation on our way home: "You meant well," he said, "but you see you were wrong. Your proposed sacrifice, for which I am just as grateful to you as if it had been effected, was useless. All I could do in return was to take you where your true inclination lay. I too can be unselfish."

I was too dejected to curse his unselfishness. I did not even trouble myself to explain what it had probably cost me. I only felt drearily that I had had my last ride. I had had enough horsemanship for ever!

That evening I went to the theatre. I wanted to deaden thought for the moment; and during one of the intervals I saw Lady Verney in the stalls, and went up to speak to her. "Your niece is not with you?" I said. "I thought I should have had a chance of—of saying good-bye to her before she left for the Continent."

I had a lingering hope that she might ask me to lunch, that I might have one more opportunity of explaining.

"Oh," said Lady Verney, "but that is all changed; we are not going—at least, not yet."

"Not going!" I cried, incredulous for very joy.

"No, it is all very sudden; but—well, you are almost like an old friend, and you are sure to hear it sooner or later. I only knew myself this afternoon, when she came in from her ride. Colonel Cockshott has proposed and she has accepted him. We're so pleased about it. Wasn't dear Mrs.—delightful in that last act? I positively saw real tears on her face!"

If I had waited much longer she would have seen a similar display of realism on mine. But I went back and sat the interval out, and listened critically to the classical selection of chamber-music from the orchestra, and saw the rest of the play, though I have no notion how it ended.

All that night my heart was slowly consumed by a dull rage that grew with every sleepless hour; but the object of

my resentment was not Diana. She had only done what as a woman she was amply justified in doing after the pointed slight I had apparently inflicted upon her. Her punishment was sufficient already, for, of course, I guessed that she had only accepted the Colonel under the first intolerable sting of desertion. No, I reserved all my wrath for Brutus, who had betrayed me at the moment of triumph. I planned revenge. Cost what it might, I would ride him once more. In the eyes of the law I was his master. I would exercise my legal rights to the full.

The afternoon came at last. I was in a white heat of anger, though as I ascended to the saddle there were bystanders who put a more uncharitable construction upon my complexion.

Brutus cast an uneasy eye at my heels as we started: "What are those things you've got on?" he inquired.

"Spurs," I replied curtly.

"You shouldn't wear them till you have learnt to turn your toes in," he said. "And a whip, too! May I ask what that is for?"

"We will discuss that presently," I said very coldly; for I did not want to have a scene with my horse in the street.

When we came round by the statue of Achilles and on to the Ride, I shortened my reins, and got a better hold of the whip, while I found that, from some cause I cannot explain, the roof of my mouth grew uncomfortably dry.

"I shall be glad of a little quiet talk with you, if you've no objection," I began.

"I am quite at your disposal," he said, champing his bit with a touch of irony.

"First, let me tell you," I said, "that I have lost my only love for ever."

"Well," he retorted flippantly, "you won't die of it. So have I. We must endeavour to console each other!"

I still maintained a deadly calm. "You seem unaware that you are the sole cause of my calamity," I said. "Had you only consented to face Wild Rose yesterday, I should have been a happy man by this time."

"How was I to know that, when you let me think all your affections were given to the elderly thing who is trotted out by my friend the grey?"

"We won't argue, please," I said hastily. "It is enough that your infernal egotism and self-will have ruined my

happiness. I have allowed you to usurp the rule, to reverse our natural positions. I shall do so no more. I intend to teach you a lesson you will never forget."

For a horse, he certainly had a keen sense of humour. I thought the girths would have snapped.

"And when do you intend to begin?" he asked, as soon as he could speak.

I looked in front of me : there were Diana and her accepted lover riding towards us ; and so natural is dissimulation, even to the sweetest and best women, that no one would have suspected from her radiant face that her gaiety covered an aching heart.

"I intend to begin *now*," I said. "Monster, demon, whatever you are that have held me in thrall so long, I have broken my chains ! I have been a coward long enough. You may kill me if you like. I rather hope you will ; but first I mean to pay you back some of the humiliation with which you have loaded me. I intend to thrash you as long as I remain in the saddle."

I have been told by eye-witnesses that the chastisement was of brief duration, but while it lasted, I flatter myself, it was severe. I laid into him with a stout whip, of whose effectiveness I had assured myself by experiments upon my own legs. I dug my borrowed spurs into his flanks. I jerked his mouth. I dare say he was almost as much surprised as pained. But he *was* pained !

I was about to continue my practical rebuke when my victim suddenly evaded my grasp ; and for one vivid second I seemed to be gazing upon a bird's-eye view of his back ; and then there was a crash, and I lay, buzzing like a bee, in an iridescent fog, and each colour meant a different pain, and they faded at last into darkness, and I remember no more.

"It was weeks," concluded Mr. Pulvertoft, "before the darkness lifted and revealed me to myself as a strapped and bandaged invalid. But—and this is perhaps the most curious part of my narrative—almost the first sounds that reached my ears were those of wedding-bells ; and I knew, without requiring to be told, that they were ringing for Diana's marriage with the Colonel. *That* showed there wasn't much the matter with me, didn't it? Why, I can hear them everywhere now. I don't think she ought to have had them rung at Sandown, though : it was just a little ostentatious, so long after the ceremony ; don't you think so ?"

"Yes—yes," I said ; "but you never told me what became of the horse."

"Ah, the horse—yes. I am looking for him. I'm not so angry with him as I was, and I don't like to ask too many questions at the stables, for fear they may tell me one day that they had to shoot him while I was so ill. You knew I was ill, I dare say ?" he broke off. "There were bulletins about me in the papers. Look here."

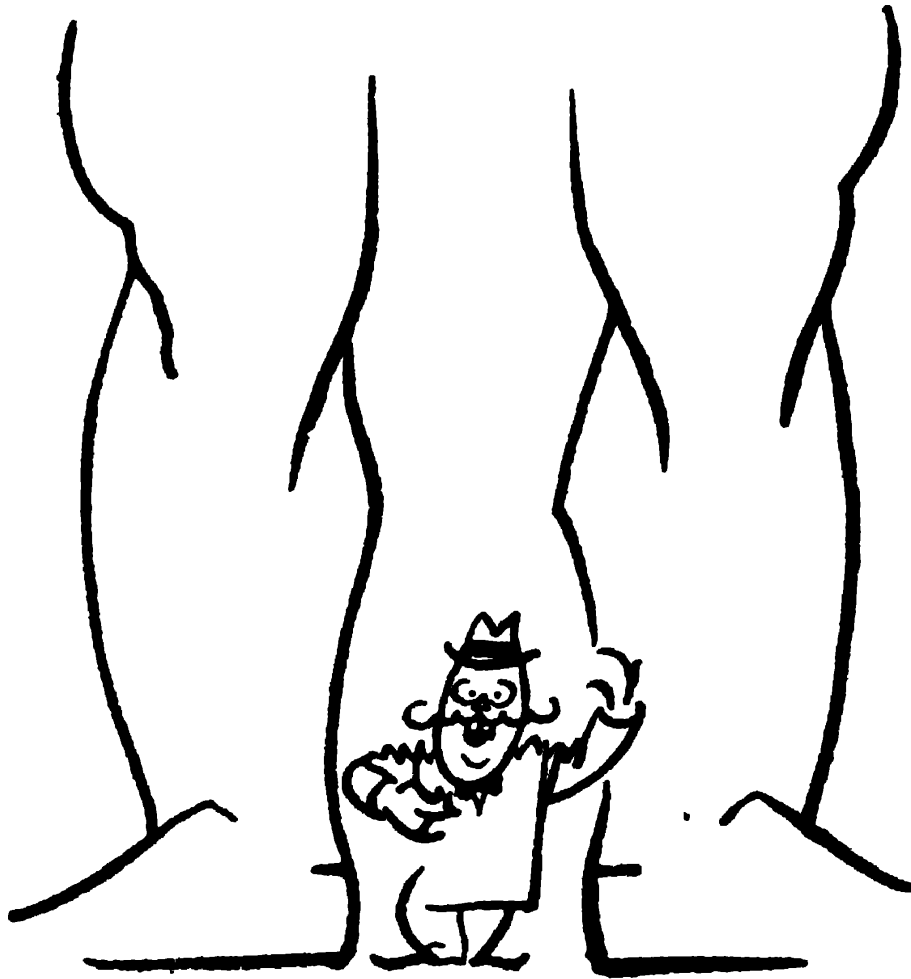
He handed me a cutting on which I read :

THE RECENT ACCIDENT IN ROTTEN ROW.—There is no change as yet in Mr. Pulvertoft's condition. The unfortunate gentleman is still lying unconscious at his rooms in Park Street ; and his medical attendants fear that, even if he recovers his physical strength, the brain will be permanently injured.

"But that was all nonsense," said Mr. Pulvertoft, with a little nervous laugh. "I wasn't injured a bit, or how could I remember everything so clearly as I do, you know ?"

And this was an argument that was, of course, unanswerable.

THE ROMAN GUIDE



MARK TWAIN

SAMUEL CLEMENS founded his literary reputation on thrilling stories of the Mississippi pilots, with whom he served in his young days. His pen-name of "Mark Twain" is derived from the call of the leadsman when sounding in shallow water. His best work included the humorous studies of boy-life, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Innocents' Abroad*.

THE ROMAN GUIDE

I WISH to say one word about Michael Angelo Buonarotti. I used to worship the mighty genius of Michael Angelo—that man who was great in poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture—great in everything he undertook. But I do not want Michael Angelo for breakfast—for luncheon—for dinner—for tea—for supper—for between meals. I like a change occasionally. In Genoa he designed everything; in Milan he or his pupils designed everything; he designed the Lake of Como; in Padua, Verona, Venice, Bologna, who did we ever hear of, from guides, but Michael Angelo? In Florence he painted everything, designed everything, nearly, and what he did not design he used to sit on a favourite stone and look at, and they showed us the stone. In Pisa he designed everything but the old shot-tower, and they would have attributed that to him if it had not been so awfully out of the perpendicular. He designed the piers of Leghorn and the custom-house regulations of Civita Vecchia. But here—here it is frightful. He designed St. Peter's; he designed the Pope; he designed the Pantheon, the uniform of the Pope's soldiers, the Tiber, the Vatican, the Coliseum, the Capitol, the Tarpeian Rock, the Barberini Palace, St. John Lateran, the Campagna, the Appian Way, the Seven Hills, the Baths of Caracalla, the Claudian Aqueduct, the Cloaca Maxima—the eternal bore designed the Eternal City, and, unless all men and books do lie, he painted everything in it! Dan said the other day to the guide, "Enough, enough, enough! Say no more! Lump the whole thing! say that the Creator made Italy from designs by Michael Angelo!"

I never felt so fervently thankful, so soothed, so tranquil, so filled with a blessed peace, as I did yesterday, when I learned that Michael Angelo was dead.

But we have taken it out of this guide. He has marched us through miles of pictures and sculpture in the vast corridors of

the Vatican ; and through miles of pictures and sculpture in twenty other places ; he has shown us the great picture in the Sistine Chapel, and frescoes enough to fresco the heavens—pretty much all done by Michael Angelo. So with him we have played that game which has vanquished so many guides for us—imbecility and idiotic questions. These creatures never suspect ; they have no idea of a sarcasm.

He shows us a figure and says : “Statoo bronzo.” (Bronze statue.) We look at it indifferently, and the doctor asks : “By Michael Angelo ?” “No—not know who.” Then he shows us the ancient Roman Forum. The doctor asks : “Michael Angelo ?” A stare from the guide. “No—thousan’ year before he is born !” Then an Egyptian obelisk. Again : “Michael Angelo ?” “Oh, *mon dieu*, genteelmen ! Zis is *two* thousan’ year before he is born !”

He grows so tired of that unceasing question sometimes that he dreads to show us anything at all. The wretch has tried all the ways he can think of to make us comprehend that Michael Angelo is only responsible for the creation of a *part* of the world, but somehow he has not succeeded yet. Relief for overtaxed eyes and brain from study and sight-seeing is necessary, or we shall become idiotic sure enough. Therefore this guide must continue to suffer. If he does not enjoy it so much the worse for him. We do.

In this place I may as well jot down a chapter concerning those necessary nuisances, European guides. Many a man has wished in his heart he could do without his guide, but, knowing he could not, has wished he could get some amusement out of him as a remuneration for the affliction of his society. We accomplished this latter matter, and if our experience can be made useful to others they are welcome to it.

Guides know about enough English to tangle everything up so that a man can make neither head nor tail of it. They know their story by heart—the history of every statue, painting, cathedral, or other wonder they show you. They know it and tell it as a parrot would—and if you interrupt, and throw them off the track, they have to go back and begin over again. All their lives long they are employed in showing strange things to foreigners and listening to their bursts of admiration. It is human nature to take delight in exciting admiration. It is what prompts children to say “smart” things, and do absurd ones, and in other ways “show off” when company is present.

It is what makes gossips turn out in rain and storm to go and be the first to tell a startling bit of news. Think, then, what a passion it becomes with a guide whose privilege it is every day to show to strangers wonders that throw them into perfect ecstasies of admiration ! He gets so that he could not by any possibility live in a soberer atmosphere. After we discovered this, we *never* went into ecstasies any more—we never admired anything—we never showed any but impassible faces and stupid indifference in the presence of the sublimest wonders a guide had to display. We had found their weak point. We have made good use of it ever since. We have made some of those people savage at times, but we have never lost our own serenity.

The doctor asks the questions generally, because he can keep his countenance, and look more like an inspired idiot, and throw more imbecility into the tone of his voice than any man that lives. It comes natural to him.

The guides in Genoa are delighted to secure an American party, because Americans so much wonder, and deal so much in sentiment and emotion before any relic of Columbus. Our guide there fidgeted about as if he had swallowed a spring mattress. He was full of animation—full of impatience. He said :

“Come wis me, genteelmen !—come ! I show you ze letter writing by Christopher Colombo !—write it himself !—write it wis his own hand !—come !”

He took us to the municipal palace. After much impressive fumbling of keys and opening of locks, the stained and aged document was spread before us. The guide’s eyes sparkled. He danced about us and tapped the parchment with his finger.

“What I tell you, genteelmen ! Is it not so ? See ! hand-writing Christopher Colombo !—write it himself !”

We looked indifferent—unconcerned. The doctor examined the document very deliberately, during a painful pause. Then he said, without any show of interest :

“Ah—Ferguson—what—what did you say was the name of the party who wrote this ?”

“Christopher Colombo ! Ze great Christopher Colombo !”

Another deliberate examination.

“Ah—did he write it himself, or—or how ?”

“He write it himself !—Christopher Colombo !—he’s own handwriting, write by himself !”

Then the doctor laid the document down and said :

"Why, I have seen boys in America only fourteen years old that could write better than that."

"But zis is ze great Christo——"

"I don't care who it is ! It's the worst writing I ever saw. Now you mustn't think you can impose on us because we are strangers. We are not fools, by a good deal. If you have got any specimens of penmanship of real merit, trot them out !—and if you haven't drive on !"

We drove on. The guide was considerably shaken up, but he made one more venture. He had something which he thought would overcome us. He said :

"Ah, genteelmen, you come wis me ! I show you beautiful, O, magnificent bust Christopher Colombo !—splendid, grand, magnificent !"

He brought us before the beautiful bust—for it *was* beautiful—and sprang back and struck an attitude.

"Ah, look, genteelmen !—beautiful, grand—bust Christopher Colombo !—beautiful bust, beautiful pedestal !"

The doctor put up his eye-glass—procured for such occasions.

"Ah—what did you say this gentleman's name was ?"

"Christopher Colombo !—ze great Christopher Colombo."

"Christopher Colombo—the great Christopher Colombo. Well, what did *he* do ?"

"Discover America !—discover America. Oh, ze devil !"

"Discover America. No—that statement will hardly wash. We are just from America ourselves. We heard nothing about it. Christopher Colombo—pleasant name—is—is he dead ?"

"Oh, *corpo di Baccho* !—three hundred year !"

"What did he die of ?"

"I do not know !—I cannot tell."

"Small-pox, think ?"

"I do not know, genteelmen !—I do not know *what* he die of !"

"Measles, likely ?"

"Maybe—maybe—I do *not* know—I think he die of some-things."

"Parents living ?"

"Im-posseeble !"

"Ah—which is the bust and which is the pedestal ?"

"*Santa Maria* !—*zis* ze bust !—*zis* ze pedestal !"

"Ah, I see, I see—happy combination—very happy combination, indeed. Is—is this the first time this gentleman was ever on a bust?"

That joke was lost on the foreigner—guides cannot master the subtleties of the American joke.

We have made it interesting to this Roman guide. Yesterday we spent three or four hours in the Vatican again, that wonderful world of curiosities. We came very near expressing interest sometimes—even admiration—it was very hard to keep from it. We succeeded though. Nobody else ever did in the Vatican museums. The guide was bewildered—nonplussed. He walked his legs off, nearly, hunting up extraordinary things, and exhausted all his ingenuity on us, but it was a failure; we never showed any interest in anything. He had reserved what he considered to be his greatest wonder till the last—a royal Egyptian mummy, the best preserved in the world, perhaps. He took us there. He felt so sure this time that some of his old enthusiasm came back to him:

"See, genteelmen!—Mummy! Mummy!"

The eye-glass came up as calmly, as deliberately as ever.

"Ah—Ferguson—what did I understand you to say the gentleman's name was?"

"Name?—he got no name!—Mummy!—'Gyptian mummy!"

"Yes, yes. Born here?"

"No! 'Gyptian mummy!"

"Ah, just so. Frenchman, I presume?"

"No!—*not* Frenchman, not Roman!—born in Egypta!"

"Born in Egypta. Never heard of Egypta before. Foreign locality, likely. Mummy—mummy. How calm he is—how self-possessed. Is, ah—is he dead?"

"Oh, *sacré bleu*, been dead three thousan' year!"

The doctor turned on him savagely:

"Here, now, what do you mean by such conduct as this! Playing us for Chinamen because we are strangers and trying to learn! Trying to impose your vile secondhand carcasses on us!—thunder and lightning, I've a notion to—to—if you've got a nice *fresh* corpse, fetch him out!—or, by George, we'll brain you!"

We make it exceedingly interesting for this Frenchman. However, he paid us back, partly, without knowing it. He came to the hotel this morning to ask if we were up, and he

endeavoured as well as he could to describe us, so that the landlord would know which persons he meant. He finished with the casual remark that we were lunatics. The observation was so innocent and so honest that it amounted to a very good thing for a guide to say.

There is one remark (already mentioned) which never yet has failed to disgust these guides. We use it always, when we can think of nothing else to say. After they have exhausted their enthusiasm pointing out to us and praising the beauties of some ancient bronze image or broken-legged statue, we look at it stupidly and in silence for five, ten, fifteen minutes—as long as we can hold out, in fact—and then ask :

“Is—is he dead ?”

That conquers the serenest of them. It is not what they are looking for—especially a new guide. Our Roman Ferguson is the most patient, unsuspecting, long-suffering subject we have had yet. We shall be sorry to part with him. We have enjoyed his society very much. We trust he has enjoyed ours, but we are harassed with doubts.

THE ASCENT OF THE RIGI

THE Rigi-Kulm is an imposing Alpine mass, 6000 feet high, which stands by itself, and commands a mighty prospect of blue lakes, green valleys, and snowy mountains—a compact and magnificent picture three hundred miles in circumference. The ascent is made by rail, or horseback, or on foot, as one may prefer. I and my agent panoplied ourselves in walking costume one bright morning, and started down the lake on the steamboat ; we got ashore at the village of Wäggis, three-quarters of an hour distant from Lucerne. This village is at the foot of the mountain.

We were soon tramping leisurely up the leafy mule-path, and then the talk began to flow, as usual. It was twelve o'clock noon, and a breezy, cloudless day ; the ascent was gradual, and the glimpses, from under the curtaining boughs, of blue water, and tiny sail-boats, and beetling cliffs, were as charming as glimpses of dreamland. All the circumstances were perfect—and the anticipations, too, for we should soon be enjoying, for the first time, that wonderful spectacle, an Alpine sunrise—the object of our journey. There was—apparently—no real need to hurry, for the guide-book made the walking distance from Wäggis to the summit only three hours and a quarter. I say “apparently”, because the guide-book had already fooled us once—about the distance from Allergeiligen to Oppenau—and for aught I knew it might be getting ready to fool us again. We were only certain as to the altitudes—we calculated to find out for ourselves how many hours it is from the bottom to the top. The summit is 6000 feet above the sea, but only 4500 feet above the lake. When we had walked half an hour, we were fairly into the swing and humour of the undertaking, so we cleared for action ; that is to say, we got a boy whom we met to carry our alpen-stocks, and satchels, and overcoats and things, for us ; that left us free for business.

I suppose we must have stopped oftener to stretch out on the grass in the shade and take a bit of a smoke than this boy was used to, for presently he asked if it had been our idea to hire him by the job or by the year. We told him he could move along if he was in a hurry. He said he wasn't in such a very particular hurry, but he wanted to get to the top while he was young. We told him to clear out then, and leave the things at the uppermost hotel and say we should be along presently. He said he would secure us a hotel if he could, but if they were all full he would ask them to build another one and hurry up and get the paint and plaster dry against we arrived. Still gently chaffing us, he pushed ahead up the trail, and soon disappeared. By six o'clock we were pretty high up in the air, and the view of lake and mountains had greatly grown in breadth and interest. We halted a while at a little public-house, where we had bread-and-cheese and a quart or two of fresh milk, out on the porch, with the big panorama all before us—and then moved on again.

Ten minutes afterwards we met a hot red-faced man plunging down the mountain, with mighty strides, swinging his alpenstock ahead of him and taking a grip on the ground with its iron point to support these big strides. He stopped, fanned himself with his hat, swabbed the perspiration from his face and neck with a red handkerchief, panted a moment or two, and asked how far it was to Wäggis. I said three hours. He looked surprised and said :

"Why, it seems as if I could toss a biscuit into the lake from here, it's so close by. Is that an inn there ?"

I said it was.

"Well," said he, "I can't stand another three hours ; I've had enough for today. I'll take a bed there."

I asked :

"Are we nearly to the top ?"

"Nearly to the *top* ! Why, bless your soul, you haven't really started yet."

I said we would put up at the inn too. So we turned back and ordered a hot supper, and had quite a jolly evening of it with this Englishman.

The German landlady gave us neat rooms and nice beds, and when I and my agent turned in, it was with the resolution to be up early and make the utmost of our first Alpine sunrise. But of course we were dead tired, and slept like policemen ;

so when we awoke in the morning and ran to the window it was already too late, because it was half past eleven. It was a sharp disappointment. However, we ordered breakfast and told the landlady to call the Englishman, but she said he was already up and off at daybreak—and swearing mad about something or other. We could not find out what the matter was. He had asked the landlady the altitude of her place above the level of the lake, and she had told him fourteen hundred and ninety-five feet. That was all that was said; then he lost his temper. He said that between — fools and guide-books, a man could acquire ignorance enough in twenty-four hours in a country like this to last him a year. Harris believed our boy had been loading him up with misinformation; and this was probably the case, for his epithet described that boy to a dot.

We got under way about the turn of noon, and pulled out for the summit again with a fresh and vigorous step. When we had got about two hundred yards, and stopped to rest, I glanced to the left while I was lighting my pipe, and in the distance detected a long worm of black smoke crawling lazily up the steep mountain. Of course that was the locomotive. We propped ourselves on our elbows at once to gaze, for we had never seen a mountain railway yet. Presently we could make out the train. It seemed incredible that the thing should creep straight up a sharp slant like the roof of a house—but there it was, and it was doing that very miracle.

In the course of a couple of hours we reached a fine breezy altitude where the little shepherd-huts had big stones all over their roofs to hold them down to the earth when the great storms rage. The country was wild and rocky about here, but there were plenty of trees, plenty of moss, and grass.

Away off on the opposite shore of the lake we could see some villages, and now for the first time we could observe the real difference between their proportions and those of the giant mountains at whose feet they slept. When one is in one of those villages it seems spacious, and its houses seem high and not out of proportion to the mountain that overhangs them—but from our altitude, what a change! The mountains were bigger and grander than ever, as they stood there thinking their solemn thoughts with their heads in the drifting clouds; but the villages at their feet—when the painstaking eye could trace them up and find them—were so reduced, so almost

invisible, and lay so flat against the ground, that the exactest simile I can devise is to compare them to ant-deposits of granulated dirt overshadowed by the huge bulk of a cathedral. The steamboats skimming along under the stupendous precipices were diminished by distance to the daintiest little toys, the sail-boats and row-boats to shallops proper for fairies that keep house in the cups of lilies and ride to court on the backs of bumble-bees.

Presently we came upon half a dozen sheep nibbling grass in the spray of a stream of clear water that sprang from a rock wall a hundred feet high, and all at once our ears were startled with a melodious "Lul . . . l . . . l . . . lul-lul-*la*hee-o-o-o!" pealing joyously from a near but invisible source, and recognized that we were hearing for the first time the famous Alpine *jodel* in its own native wilds. And we recognized, also, that it was that sort of quaint commingling of baritone and falsetto which at home we call "Tyrolese warbling".

The jodelling (pronounced *yodling*—emphasis on the *o*) continued, and was very pleasant and inspiring to hear. Now the jodeller appeared—a shepherd-boy of sixteen—and in our gladness and gratitude we gave him a franc to jodel some more. So he jodelled, and we listened. We moved on presently, and he generously jodelled us out of sight. After about fifteen minutes, we came across another shepherd-boy who was jodelling, and gave him half a franc to keep it up. He also jodelled us out of sight. After that, we found a jodeller every ten minutes. We gave the first one eight cents, the second one six cents, the third one four cents, the fourth one a penny, contributed nothing to Nos. 5, 6, 7, and during the remainder of the day hired the rest of the jodellers, at a franc apiece, not to jodel any more. There is somewhat too much of this jodelling in the Alps.

About the middle of the afternoon we passed through a prodigious natural gateway, called the Felsenthor, formed by two enormous upright rocks, with a third lying across the top. There was a very attractive little hotel close by, but our energies were not conquered yet, so we went on.

Three hours afterward we came to the railway-track. It was planted straight up the mountain with the slant of a ladder that leans against a house, and it seemed to us that a man would need good nerves who proposed to travel either up it or down it.

During the latter part of the afternoon we cooled our roasting interiors with ice-cold water from clear streams, the only really satisfying water we had tasted since we left home, for at the hotels on the Continent they merely give you a tumbler of ice to soak your water in, and that only modifies its hotness, doesn't make it cold. Water can only be made cold enough for summer comfort by being prepared in a refrigerator or a closed ice-pitcher. Europeans say ice-water impairs digestion. How do they know?—they never drink any.

At ten minutes past six we reached the Kaltbad station, where there is a spacious hotel with great verandahs which command a majestic expanse of lake and mountain scenery. We were pretty well fagged out now, but as we did not wish to miss the Alpine sunrise, we got through with our dinner as quickly as possible and hurried off to bed. It was unspeakably comfortable to stretch our weary limbs between the cold, damp sheets. And how we did sleep!—for there is no opiate like Alpine pedestrianism.

In the morning we both awoke and leaped out of bed at the same instant and ran and stripped aside the window-curtains, but we suffered a bitter disappointment again : it was already half past three in the afternoon.

We dressed sullenly and in ill spirits, each accusing the other of over-sleeping. Harris said if we had brought the courier along, as we ought to have done, we should not have missed these sunrises. I said he knew very well that one of us would have had to sit up and wake the courier ; and I added that we were having trouble enough to take care of ourselves on this climb, without having to take care of a courier besides.

During breakfast our spirits came up a little, since we found by the guide-book that in the hotels on the summit the tourist is not left to trust to luck for his sunrise, but is roused betimes by a man who goes through the halls with a great Alpine horn, blowing blasts that would raise the dead. And there was another consoling thing : the guide-book said that up there on the summit the guests did not wait to dress much, but seized a red bed-blanket and sailed out arrayed like an Indian. This was good ; this would be romantic : two hundred and fifty people grouped on the windy summit, with their hair flying and their red blankets flapping, in the solemn presence of the snowy ranges and the messenger splendours of the coming

sun, would be a striking and memorable spectacle. So it was good luck, not ill luck, that we had missed those other sunrises.

We were informed by the guide-book that we were now 3228 feet above the level of the lake—therefore full two-thirds of our journey had been accomplished. We got away at 4.15 p.m. A hundred yards above the hotel the railway divided; one track went straight up the steep hill, the other one turned square off to the right, with a very slight grade. We took the latter, and followed it more than a mile, turned a rocky corner, and came in sight of a handsome new hotel. If we had gone on, we should have arrived at the summit, but Harris preferred to ask a lot of questions—as usual of a man who didn't know anything—and he told us to go back and follow the other route. We did so. We could ill afford this loss of time.

We climbed and climbed; and we kept on climbing; we reached about forty summits; but there was always another one just ahead. It came on to rain, and it rained in dead earnest. We were soaked through, and it was bitter cold. Next a smoky fog of clouds covered the whole region densely, and we took to the railway-ties to keep from getting lost. Sometimes we slopped along in a narrow path on the left-hand side of the track, but by and by, when the fog blew aside a little and we saw that we were treading the rampart of a precipice, and that our left elbows were projecting over a perfectly boundless and bottomless vacancy, we gasped, and jumped for the ties again.

The night shut down, dark, drizzly, and cold. About eight in the evening the fog lifted and showed us a well-worn path which led up a very steep rise to the left. We took it, and as soon as we had got far enough from the railway to render the finding it again an impossibility, the fog shut down on us once more.

We were in a bleak, unsheltered place now, and had to trudge right along in order to keep warm, though we rather expected to go over a precipice sooner or later. About nine o'clock we made an important discovery—that we were not in any path. We groped around a while on our hands and knees, but could not find it; so we sat down in the mud and the wet, scant grass to wait. We were terrified into this by being suddenly confronted with a vast body which showed

itself vaguely for an instant, and in the next instant was smothered in the fog again. It was really the hotel we were after, monstrously magnified by the fog, but we took it for the face of a precipice, and decided not to try to claw up it.

We sat there an hour, with chattering teeth and quivering bodies, and quarrelled over all sorts of trifles, but gave most of our attention to abusing each other for the stupidity of deserting the railway-track. We sat with our backs to that precipice, because what little wind there was came from that quarter. At some time or other the fog thinned a little; we did not know when, for we were facing the empty universe and the thinness could not show; but at last Harris happened to look round, and there stood a huge, dim, spectral hotel where the precipice had been. One could faintly discern the windows and chimneys, and a dull blur of lights. Our first emotion was deep, unutterable gratitude, our next was a foolish rage, born of the suspicion that possibly the hotel had been visible three-quarters of an hour while we sat there in those cold puddles quarrelling.

Yes, it was the Rigi-Kulm hotel—the one that occupies the extreme summit, and whose remote little sparkle of lights we had often seen glinting high aloft among the stars from our balcony away down yonder in Lucerne. The crusty *portier* and the crusty clerks gave us the surly reception which their kind deal in in prosperous times, but by mollifying them with an extra display of obsequiousness and servility we finally got them to show us to the room which our boy had engaged for us.

We got into some dry clothing, and while our supper was preparing we loafed forsakenly through a couple of vast, cavernous drawing-rooms, one of which had a stove in it. This stove was in a corner, and densely walled around with people. We could not get near the fire, so we moved at large in the arctic spaces, among a multitude of people who sat silent, smileless, forlorn, and shivering—thinking what fools they were to come, perhaps. There were some Americans, and some Germans, but one could see that the great majority were English.

We lounged into an apartment where there was a great crowd, to see what was going on. It was a memento magazine. The tourists were eagerly buying all sorts and styles of paper-cutters, marked "Souvenir of the Rigi", with

handles made of the little curved horns of the ostensible chamois ; there were all manner of wooden goblets and such things, similarly marked. I was going to buy a paper-cutter, but I believed I could remember the cold comfort of the Rigi-Kulm without it, so I smothered the impulse.

Supper warmed us, and we went immediately to bed ; but first, as Mr. Baedeker requests all tourists to call his attention to any errors which they may find in his guide-books, I dropped him a line to inform him that when he said the foot journey from Wäggis to the summit was only three hours and a quarter, he missed it by just about three days. I had previously informed him of his mistake about the distance from Allerheiligen to Oppenau, and had also informed the Ordnance Department of the German Government of the same error in the Imperial maps. I will add, here, that I never got any answer to these letters, or any thanks from either of those sources ; and what is still more discourteous, these corrections have not been made, either in the maps or the guide-books. But I will write again when I get time, for my letters may have miscarried.

We curled up in the clammy beds, and went to sleep without rocking. We were so sodden with fatigue that we never stirred nor turned over till the blasts of the Alpine horn aroused us. It may well be imagined that we did not lose any time. We snatched on a few odds and ends of clothing, cocooned ourselves in the proper red blankets, and plunged along the halls and out into the whistling wind bare-headed. We saw a tall wooden scaffolding on the very peak of the summit, a hundred yards away, and made for it. We rushed up the stairs to the top of this scaffolding, and stood there, above the vast outlying world, with hair flying and ruddy blankets waving and cracking in the fierce breeze.

"Fifteen minutes too late, at least !" said Harris, in a vexed voice. "The sun is clear above the horizon."

"No matter," I said. "It is a most magnificent spectacle, and we will see it do the rest of its rising, anyway."

In a moment we were deeply absorbed in the marvel before us, and dead to everything else. The great cloud-barred disc of the sun stood just above a limitless expanse of tossing white caps—so to speak—a billowy chaos of massy mountain domes and peaks draped in imperishable snow, and flooded with an opaline glory of changing and dissolving splendour,

whilst through rifts in a black cloud-bank above the sun radiating lances of diamond dust shot to the zenith. The cloven valleys of the lower world swam in a tinted mist which veiled the ruggedness of their crags and ribs and ragged forests, and turned all the forbidding region into a soft and rich and sensuous paradise.

We could not speak. We could hardly breathe. We could only gaze in drunken ecstasy and drink it in. Presently Harris exclaimed :

"Why, ——nation, it's going *down* !"

Perfectly true. We had missed the *morning* horn-blow, and slept all day. This was stupefying. Harris said :

"Look here, the sun isn't the spectacle—it's *us*—stacked up here on top of this gallows, in these idiotic blankets, and two hundred and fifty well-dressed men and women down here gawking up at us and not caring a straw whether the sun rises or sets, as long as they've got such a ridiculous spectacle as this to set down in their memorandum-books. They seem to be laughing their ribs loose, and there's one girl there that appears to be going all to pieces. I never saw such a man as you before. I think you are the very last possibility in the way of an ass."

"What have *I* done ?" I answered with heat.

"What have you done ? You've got up at half past seven o'clock in the evening to see the sun rise, that's what you've done."

"And have you done any better, I'd like to know ? I always used to get up with the lark, till I came under the petrifying influence of your turgid intellect."

"*You* used to get up with the lark ! Oh, no doubt ; you'll get up with the hangman one of these days. But you ought to be ashamed to be jawing here like this in a red blanket, on a forty-foot scaffold on top of the Alps. And no end of people down here to boot ; this isn't any place for an exhibition of temper."

And so the customary quarrel went on. When the sun was fairly down, we slipped back to the hotel in the charitable gloaming, and went to bed again. We had encountered the horn-blower on the way, and he had tried to collect compensation, not only for announcing the sunset, which we did see, but for the sunrise, which we had totally missed, but we said no, we only took our solar rations on the "European

plan"—pay for what you get. He promised to make us hear his horn in the morning, if we were alive.

He kept his word. We heard his horn and instantly got up. It was dark and cold and wretched. As I fumbled around for the matches, knocking things down with my quaking hands, I wished the sun would rise in the middle of the day, when it was warm and bright and cheerful, and one wasn't sleepy. We proceeded to dress by the gloom of a couple of sickly candles, but we could hardly button anything, our hands shook so. I thought of how many happy people there were in Europe, Asia, and America, and everywhere, who were sleeping peacefully in their beds and did not have to get up and see the Rigi sunrise—people who did not appreciate their advantage, as like as not, but would get up in the morning wanting more boons of Providence. While thinking these thoughts I yawned, in a rather ample way, and my upper teeth got hitched on a nail over the door, and whilst I was mounting a chair to free myself, Harris drew the window-curtain and said :

"Oh, this is luck ! We shan't have to go out at all ; yonder are the mountains, in full view."

That was glad news, indeed. It made us cheerful right away. One could see the grand Alpine masses dimly outlined against the black firmament, and one or two faint stars blinking through rifts in the night. Fully clothed, and wrapped in blankets, we huddled ourselves up, by the window, with lighted pipes, and fell into chat, while we waited in exceeding comfort to see how an Alpine sunrise was going to look by candle-light. By and by a delicate, spiritual sort of effulgence spread itself by imperceptible degrees over the loftiest altitudes of the snowy wastes—but there the effort seemed to stop. I said presently :

"There is a hitch about this sunrise somewhere. It doesn't seem to go. What do you reckon is the matter with it ?"

"I don't know. It appears to hang fire somewhere. I never saw a sunrise act like that before. Can it be that the hotel is playing anything on us ?"

"Of course not. The hotel merely has a property interest in the sun ; it has nothing to do with the management of it. It is a precarious kind of property, too ; a succession of total eclipses would probably ruin this tavern. Now, what can be the matter with this sunrise ?"

Harris jumped up and said :

"I've got it ! I know what's the matter with it ! We've been looking at the place where the sun *set* last night !"

"It is perfectly true ! Why couldn't you have thought of that sooner ! Now we've lost another one. And all through your blundering. It was exactly like you to light a pipe and sit down to wait for the sun to rise in the west."

"It was exactly like me to find out the mistake, too. You never would have found it out. I find out all the mistakes."

"You make them all, too, else your most valuable faculty would be wasted on you. But don't stop to quarrel now ; maybe we are not too late yet."

But we were. The sun was well up when we got to the exhibition ground.

On our way up we met the crowd returning—men and women dressed in all sorts of queer costumes, and exhibiting all degrees of cold and wretchedness in their gaits and countenances. A dozen still remained on the ground when we reached there, huddled together about the scaffold with their backs to the bitter wind. They had their red guide-books open at the diagram of the view, and were painfully picking out the several mountains, and trying to impress their names and positions on their memories. It was one of the saddest sights I ever saw.

Two sides of this place were guarded by railings, to keep people from being blown over the precipices. The view, looking sheer down into the broad valley, eastward, from this great elevation—almost a perpendicular mile—was very quaint and curious. Counties, towns, hilly ribs and ridges, wide stretches of green meadow, great forest tracts, winding streams, a dozen blue lakes, a flock of busy steamboats—we saw all this little world in unique circumstantiality of detail—saw it just as the birds see it—and all reduced to the smallest of scales, and as sharply worked out and finished as a steel-engraving. The numerous toy villages, with tiny spires projecting out of them, were just as the children might have left them when done with play the day before ; the forest tracts were diminished to cushions of moss ; one or two big lakes were dwarfed to ponds, the smaller ones to puddles—though they did not look like puddles but like blue ear-drops which had fallen and lodged in slight depressions, comformable to their shapes, among the moss-beds and the smooth levels of dainty green

farm-land ; the microscopic steamboats glided along as in a city reservoir, taking a mighty time to cover the distance between ports which seemed only a yard apart ; and the isthmus which separated two lakes looked as if one might stretch out on it and lie with both elbows in the water ; yet we knew invisible wagons were toiling across it and finding the distance a tedious one. This beautiful miniature world had exactly the appearance of those "relief maps" which reproduce nature precisely, with the heights and depressions and other details graduated to a reduced scale, and with the rocks, trees, lakes, etc., coloured after nature.

I believed we could walk down to Wäggis or Vitznau in a day, but I knew we could go down by rail in about an hour, so I chose the latter method. I wanted to see what it was like, anyway. The train came along about the middle of the forenoon, and an odd thing it was. The locomotive boiler stood on end, and it and the whole locomotive were tilted sharply backward. There were two passenger-cars, roofed, but wide open all around. These cars were not tilted back, but the seats were ; this enables the passenger to sit level while going down a steep incline.

There are three railway-tracks ; the central one is cogged ; the "lantern wheel" of the engine grips its way along these cogs, and pulls the train up the hill or retards its motion on the down trip. About the same speed—three miles an hour—is maintained both ways. Whether going up or down, the locomotive is always at the lower end of the train. It pushes in the one case, braces back in the other. The passenger rides backwards going up, and faces forward going down.

We got front seats, and while the train moved along about fifty yards on level ground, I was not the least frightened ; but now it started abruptly downstairs, and I caught my breath. And I, like my neighbours, unconsciously held back, all I could, and threw my weight to the rear, but of course that did no particular good. I had slid down the balusters when I was a boy, and thought nothing of it, but to slide down the balusters in a railway-train is a thing to make one's flesh creep. Sometimes we had as much as ten yards of almost level ground, and this gave us a few full breaths in comfort ; but straightway we would turn a corner and see a long steep line of rails stretching down below us, and the comfort was at an end. One expected to see the locomotive pause, or slack up a little, and approach

this plunge cautiously, but it did nothing of the kind ; it went calmly on, and when it reached the jumping-off place it made a sudden bow, and went gliding smoothly downstairs, untroubled by the circumstances.

It was wildly exhilarating to slide along the edge of the precipices after this grisly fashion, and look straight down upon that far-off valley which I was describing a while ago.

There was no level ground at the Kaltbad station ; the rail-bed was as steep as a roof ; I was curious to see how the stop was going to be managed. But it was very simple ; the train came sliding down, and when it reached the right spot it just stopped—that was all there was “to it”—stopped on the steep incline, and when the exchange of passengers and baggage had been made, it moved off and went sliding down again. The train can be stopped anywhere at a moment’s notice.

There was one curious effect, which I need not take the trouble to describe, because I can scissor a description of it out of the railway company’s advertising pamphlet, and save my ink :

“On the whole tour, particularly at the Descent, we undergo an optical illusion which often seems to be incredible. All the shrubs, fir-trees, stables, houses, etc., seem to be bent in a slanting direction, as by an immense pressure of air. They are all standing awry, so much awry that the chalets and cottages of the peasants seem to be tumbling down. It is the consequence of the steep inclination of the line. Those who are seated in the carriage do not observe that they are going down a declivity of 20° to 25° (their seats being adapted to this course of proceeding and being bent down at their backs). They mistake their carriage and its horizontal lines for a proper measure of the normal plane, and therefore all the objects outside, which really are in a horizontal position, must show a disproportion of 20° to 25° declivity in regard to the mountain.”

By the time one reaches Kaltbad one has acquired confidence in the railway, and now ceases to ease the locomotive by holding back, and thenceforward smoking a pipe in serenity, and gazing out upon the magnificent picture below and about with unfettered enjoyment. There is nothing to interrupt the view or the breeze ; it is like inspecting the world on the wing. However, to be exact, there is one place where the serenity lapses for a while ; this is while one is crossing the Schnurrtobel Bridge : a frail structure which swings its

gossamer frame down through the dizzy air, over a gorge, like a vagrant spider strand.

One has no difficulty in remembering his sins while the train is creeping down this bridge ; and he repents of them, too ; though he sees, when he gets to Vitznau, that he need not have done it—the bridge was perfectly safe.

So ends the eventful trip which we made up to the Rigi-Kulm to see an Alpine sunrise.

MISS SHUM'S HUSBAND



W. M. THACKERAY

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY was one of the giants of Victorian literature, famous for his gift of characterization and knowledge of life. He began by contributing both articles and drawings to *Punch*, and the publication of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* established him in the front rank of novelists.

MISS SHUM'S HUSBAND

I WAS born in the year one, of the present or Christian hera, and am, in consquints, seven-and-thirty years old. My manma called me Charles Edward Harrington Fitzroy Yellowplush, in compliment to several noble families, and to a sellybrated coachmin whom she knew, who wore a yellow livry, and drove the Lord Mayor of London.

Why she geb me this genlman's name is a diffiklty, or rayther the name of a part of his dress ; however, it's stuck to me through life, in which I was, as it were, a footman by both.

Praps he was my father—though on this subject I can't speak suttinly, for my ma wrapped up my both in a mistry. I may be illygitmit, I may have been changed at nuss ; but I've always had genlmanly tastes through life, and have no doubt that I come of a genlmanly origin.

The less I say about my parint the better, for the dear old creature was very good to me, and, I fear, had very little other goodness in her. Why, I can't say ; but I always passed as her nevyou. We led a strange life ; sometimes ma was dressed in sattn and rooge, and sometimes in rags and dutt ; sometimes I got kisses, and sometimes kix ; sometimes gin, and sometimes shampang : law bless us ! how she used to swear at me, and cuddle me ; there we were, quarrelling and making up, sober and tipsy, starving and guttling by turns, just as ma got money or spent it. But let me draw a vail over the seen, and speak of her no more—its sfishnt for the public to know, that her name was Miss Montmorency, and we lived in the New Cut.

My poor mother died one morning, hev'n bless her ! and I was left alone in this wide wicked wuld, without so much money as would buy me a penny roal for my brexfast. But there was some amongst our naybours (and let me tell you there's more kindness among them poor disreppytale creaturs than in half a dozen lords or barrynets) who took pity upon poor Sal's orfin (for they bust out laffin when

I called her Miss Montmorency), and gev me bred and shelter. I'm afraid, in spite of their kindness, that my *morris* wouldn't have improved if I'd stayed long among 'em. But a benny-violent genl'mn saw me, and put me to school. The acadmy which I went to was called the Free School of Saint Bartholomew's the Less—the young genl'mn wore green baize coats, yellow leather whasisnames, a tin plate on the left harm, and a cap about the size of a muffing. I stayed there sick's years, from sick's, that is to say, till my twelfth year, during three years of witch, I distinguished myself not a little in the musicle way, for I bloo the bellus of the church horgin, and very fine tunes we played too.

Well, it's not worth recounting my jewvenile follies (what trix we used to play the applewoman ! and how we put snuff in the old clark's Prayer-book—my eye !); but one day, a genl'mn entered the school-room—it was on the very day when I went to subtraxion—and asked the master for a young lad for a servant. They pitched upon me glad enough ; and nex day found me sleeping in the skullery, close under the sink, at Mr. Bago's country-house at Pentonwille.

Bago kep a shop in Smithfield market, and drov a taring good trade, in the hoil and Italian way. I've heard him say, that he cleared no less than fifty pounds every year, by letting his front room at hanging time. His winders looked right opsit Newgit, and many and many dozen chaps has he seen hangin there. Laws was laws in the year ten, and they screwed chap's nex for nex to nothink. But my bisniss was at his country-house, where I made my first *ontray* into fashnabl life. I was knife, errint, and stable-boy then, and an't ashamed to own it ; for my merrits have raised me to what I am—two livries, forty pound a year, malt-licker, washin, silk-stockins, and wax-candles—not countin wails, which is somethink pretty considerable at *our* house, I can tell you.

I didn't stay long here, for a suckmstance happened which got me a very different situation. A handsome young genl'mn, who kep a tilbry, and ridin hoss at livry, wanted a tiger. I bid at once for the place ; and, being a neat tidy-looking lad, he took me.

Bago gave me a character, and he my first livry ; proud enough I was of it, as you may fancy.

My new master had some business in the city, for he went in every morning at ten, got out of his tilbry at the Citty Road,

and had it waiting for him at six ; when, if it was summer, he spanked round into the Park, and drove one of the neatest turnouts there. Wery proud I was in a gold-laced hat, a drab coat, and a red weskit, to sit by his side, when he drove. I already began to ogle the gals in the carridges, and to feel that longing for fashnabl life which I've had ever since. When he was at the oppera, or the play, down I went to skittles, or to White Condict Gardens ; and Mr. Frederic Altamont's young man was somebody, I warrant ; to be sure there is very few manservants at Pentonwille, the poppylation being mostly gals of all work : and so, though only fourteen, I was as much a man down there, as if I had been as old as Jerusalem.

But the most singlar thing was, that my master, who was such a gay chap, should live in such a hole. He had only a ground-floor in John Street—a parlor and a bedroom. I slep over the way, and only came in with his boots and brexfast of a morning.

The house he lodged in belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Shum. They were a poor but prolific couple, who had rented the place for many years ; and they and their family were squeezed in it pretty tight, I can tell you.

Shum said he had been a hofficer, and so he had. He had been a sub-deputy, assistant, vice-commissary, or some such think ; and, as I heerd afterwards, had been obliged to leave on account of his *nervousness*. He was such a coward, the fact is, that he was considered dangerous to the harmy, and sent home.

He had married a widow Buckmaster, who had been a Miss Slamcoe. She was a Bristol gal ; and her father being a bankrup in the tallow-chandlery way, left, in course, a pretty little sum of money. A thousand pound was settled on her ; and she was as high and mighty as if it had been a millium.

Buckmaster died, leaving nothink ; nothink excep four ugly daughters by Miss Slamcoe : and her forty pound a year was rayther a narrow income for one of her appytite and pretensions. In an unlucky hour for Shum she met him. He was a widower with a little daughter of three years old, a little house at Pentonwille, and a little income about as big as her own. I believe she bullyd the poor creature into marriage ; and it was agreed that he should let his ground-floor at John Street, and so add somethink to their means.

They married ; and the widow Buckmaster was the grey mare, I can tell you. She was always talking and blustering about her famly, the celebrity of the Buckmasters, and the antickety of the Slamcoes. They had a six-roomed house (not counting kitching and scultry), and now twelve daughters in all ; whizz.—4 Miss Buckmasters : Miss Betsy, Miss Dosy, Miss Biddy, and Miss Winny ; 1 Miss Shum, Mary by name, Shum's daughter, and seven others, who shall be nameless. Mrs. Shum was a fat, red-haired woman, at least a foot taller than S., who was but a yard and a half high, pale-faced red-nosed, knock-kneed, bald-headed, his nose and shut-frill all brown with snuff.

Before the house was a little garden, where the washin of the famly was all ways hanging. There was so many of em that it was obliged to be done by relays. There was six rails and a stocking on each, and four small goosbry bushes, always covered with some bit of lining or other. The hall was a reglar puddle : wet dabs of dishclouts flapped in your face : soapy smoking bits of flanning went nigh to choke you ; and while you were looking up to prevent hanging yourself with the ropes which were strung across and about, slap came the hedge of a pail against your shins, till one was like to be drove mad with hagony. The great slattnly doddling girls was always on the stairs, poking about with nasty flower-pots, a-cooking something, or sprawling in the window-seats with greasy curl-papers, reading greasy novls. An infernal pianna was jingling from mornin till night—two eldest Miss Buckmasters, "Battle of Prag"—six youngest Miss Shums, "In my Cottage", till I knew every note in the "Battle of Prag", and cussed the day when "In my Cottage" was rote. The younger girls, too, were always bouncing and thumping about the house, with torn pinnyfores, and dog's-eard grammars, and large pieces of bread-and-treacle. I never see such a house.

As for Mrs. Shum, she was such a fine lady, that she did nothink but lay on the drawing-room sophy, read novels, drink, scold, scream, and go into hystarrix. Little Shum kep reading an old newspaper from week's end to week's end, when he was not engaged in teachin the children, or goin for the beer, or cleanin the shoes, for they kep no servant. This house in John Street was in short a reglar Pandymony.

What could have brought Mr. Frederic Altamont to dwell

in such a place? The reason is hobvius; he adoared the fust Miss Shum.

And suttlny he did not show a bad taste, for though the other daughters were as ugly as their hideous ma, Mary Shum was a pretty, little, pink, modest creatur, with glossy black hair and tender blue eyes, and a neck as white as plaster of Parish. She wore a dismal old black gownd, which had grown too short for her, and too tight; but it only served to show her pretty angles and fect, and bewchus figger. Master, though he had looked rather low for the gal of his art, had certainly looked in the right place. Never was one more pretty or more hamiable. I gav her always the buttered toast left from our brexfast, and a cup of tea or chocklate as Altamont might fancy; and the poor thing was glad enough of it, I can vouch; for they had precious short commons upstairs, and she the least of all.

For it seemed as if which of the Shum famly shoould try to snub the poor thing most. There was the four Buckmaster gals always at her. It was, Mary, git the coal-skittle; Mary, run down to the public-house for the beer; Mary, I intend to wear your clean stockens out walking, or your new bonnet to church. Only her poor father was kind to her; and he, poor old muff! his kindness was of no use. Mary bore all the scolding like an angel, as she was; no, not if she had a pair of wings and a goold trumpet, could she have been a greater angel.

I never shall forgit one seen that took place. It was when master was in the city; and so, having nothink earthly to do, I happened to be listening on the stairs. The old scolding was a-going on, and the old tune of that hojus "Battle of Prag". Old Shum made some remark; and Miss Buckmaster cried out, "Law, pa! what a fool you are!" All the gals began laffin, and so did Mrs. Shum; all, that is, excep Mary, who turned as red as flams, and going up to Miss Betsy Buckmaster, give her two such wax on her great red ears, as made them tingle again.

Old Mrs. Shum screamed, and ran at her like a Bengal tiger. Her great arms went weeling about like a vinmill, as she cuffed and thumped poor Mary for taking her pa's part. Mary Shum, who was always a-crying before, didn't shed a tear now. "I will do it again," she said, "if Betsy insults my father." New thumps, new shreex! and the old horridan went

on beatin the poor girl, till she was quite exosted, and fell down on the sophy, puffin like a poppus.

"For shame, Mary," began old Shum: "for shame, you naughty gal, you ! for hurting the feelins of your dear mamma, and beating kind sister."

"Why, it was because she called you a——"

"If she did, you pert miss," said Shum, looking mighty dignitified, "I could correct her, and not you."

"You correct me, indeed !" said Miss Betsy, turning up her nose, if possible, higher than before ; "I should like to see you crect me ! Imperence !" and they all began laffin again.

By this time Mrs. S. had recovered from the effex of her exsize, and she began to pour in *her* wolly. Fust she called Mary names, then Shum.

"Oh, why," screeched she, "why did I ever leave a genteel famly, where I ad every ellygance and lucksry, to marry a creature like this ? He is unfit to be called a man, he is unworthy to marry a gentlewoman ; and as for that hussy, I disown her ! Thank heaven, she ant a Slamcoe ; she is only fit to be a Shum !"

"That's true, mamma," said all the gals, for their mother had taught them this pretty piece of manners, and they despised their father heartily ; indeed, I have always remarked that, in families where the wife is internally talking about the merits of her branch, the husband is invariably a spooney.

Well, when she was exosted again, down she fell on the sofy, at her old trix—more skreeching, more convulshuns—and she wouldn't stop, this time, till Shum had got her half a pint of her old remedy, from the "Blue Lion" over the way. She grew more easy as she finished the gin ; but Mary was sent out of the room, and told not to come back agin all day.

"Miss Mary," says I—for my heart yurned to the poor gal, as she came sobbing and misrable downstairs ; "Miss Mary," says I, "if I might make so bold, here's master's room empty, and I know where the cold bif and pickles is." "O Charles !" said she, nodding her head sadly, "I'm too retched to have any happytite" ; and she flung herself on a chair, and began to cry fit to bust.

At this moment, who should come in but my master. I had taken hold of Miss Mary's hand, somehow, and do believe I should have kist it, when, as I said, Haltamont made his appearance. "What's this ?" cries he, lookin at me as black as

thunder, or as Mr. Phillips as Hickit, in the new tragedy of Mac Buff.

"It's only Miss Mary, sir," answered I.

"Get out, sir," says he, as fierce as posbil, and I felt some-think (I think it was the tip of his to) touching me behind, and found myself, nex minnit, sprawling among the wet flannings, and buckets and things.

The people from upstairs came to see what was the matter, as I was cussin and cryin out. "It's only Charles, ma," screamed out Miss Betsy.

"Where's Mary?" says Mrs. Shum from the sofy.

"She's in master's room, miss," said I.

"She's in the lodger's room, ma," cries Miss Shum, heckoing me.

"Very good; tell her to stay there till he comes back." And then Miss Shum went bouncing up the stairs again, little knowing of Haltamont's return.

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I'd long before observed that my master had an anchoring after Mary Shum; indeed, as I have said, it was purely for her sake that he took and kep his lodgings at Pentonwille. Excep for the sake of love, which is above being mersnary, fourteen shillings a wick was a *little* too strong for two such rat-holes as he lived in. I do blieve the family had nothing else but their lodger to live on: they brekfisted off his tea-leaves, they cut away pounds and pounds of meat from his jints (he always dined at home), and his baker's bill was at least enough for six. But that wasn't my business. I saw him grin, sometimes, when I laid down the cold bif of a morning, to see how little was left of yesterday's sirline; but he never said a syllabub; for true love don't mind a pound of meat or so hextra.

At first, he was very kind and attentive to all the gals; Miss Betsy, in partickler, grew mighty fond of him; they sate, for whole evenings, playing cribbitch, he taking his pipe and glas, she her tea and muffing; but as it was improper for her to come alone, she brought one of her sisters, and this was genrally Mary—for he made a pint of asking her, too—and one day, when one of the others came instead, he told her, very quitely, that he hadn't invited her; and Miss Buckmaster was too fond of muffings to try this game on again; besides, she was jealous of her three grown sisters, and considered

Mary as only a child. Law bless us ! how she used to ogle him, and quot bits of pottry, and play "Meet me by moonlike", on an old gitter ;—she reglar flung herself at his head, but he wouldn't have it, bein better ockypied elsewhere.

One night, as genteel as possible, he brought home tickets for Ashley's, and proposed to take the two young ladies—Miss Betsy, and Miss Mary, in course. I recklect he called me aside that afternoon, assuming a solamon and misterus hare, "Charles," said he, "*are you up to snuff?*"

"Why, sir," said I, "I'm genrally considered tolerably downy."

"Well," says he, "I'll give you half a suffering if you can manage this bisniss for me ; I've chose a rainy night on purpus. When the theatre is over, you must be waitin' with two umbrellos ; give me one, and hold the other over Miss Buckmaster ; and, hark ye, sir, *turn to the right* when you leave the theatre, and say the coach is ordered to stand a little way up the street, in order to get rid of the crowd."

We went (in a fly hired by Mr. H.), and never shall I forgit Cartliche's hacting on that memrable night. Talk of Kimble ! talk of Magreedy ! Ashley's for my money, with Cartlitch in the principal part. But this is nothink to the porpus. When the play was over, I was at the door with the umbrellos. It was raining cats and dogs, sure enough.

Mr. Altamont came out presently, Miss Mary under his arm, and Miss Betsy followin behind, rayther sulky. "This way, sir," cries I, pushin forward ; and I threw a great cloak over Miss Betsy, fit to smother her. Mr. A. and Miss Mary skipped on, and was out of sight when Miss Betsy's cloak was settled, you may be sure.

"They're only gone to the fly, miss. It's a little way up the street, away from the crowd of carriages." And off we turned *to the right*, and no mistake.

After marchin a little through the splash and mud, "Has anybody seen Coxy's fly ?" cries I, with the most innocent haxent in the world.

"Cox's fly !" hollows out one chap. "Is it the vaggin you want ?" says another. "I see the blackin wan pass," giggles out another genlmn ; and there was such an interchange of compliments as you never heerd. I pass them over though, because some of 'em were not wery genteel.

"Law, miss," said I, "what shall I do ? My master will

never forgive me : and I haven't a single sixpence to pay a coach." Miss Betsy was just going to call one when I said that, but the coachman wouldn't have it at that price, he said, and I knew very well that *she* hadn't four or five shillings to pay for a vehicle. So, in the midst of that tarin rain, at midnight, we had to walk four miles, from Westminster Bridge to Pentonville ; and, what was wuss, *I didn't happen to know the way*. A very nice walk it was and no mistake.

At about half past two, we got safe to John Street. (My master was at the garden gate. Miss Mary flew into Miss Betsy's arms, whil master began cussin and swearin at me for disobeying his orders, and *turning to the right instead of to the left !* Law bless me ! his acting of anger was very near as natral and as terrybil as Mr. Cartlich's in the play.

They had waited half an hour, he said, in the fly, in the little street at the left of the theatre ; they had drove up and down in the greatest fright possible ; and at last came home, thinking it was in vain to wait any more. They gave her 'ot rum and water and roast oysters for supper, and this consoled her a little.

I hope nobody will cast an imputation on Miss Mary for *her* share in this advenster, for she was as honest a gal as ever lived, and I do believe is hignorant to this day of our little strattygim. Besides, all's fair in love ; and, as my master could never get to see her alone, on account of her infernal eleven sisters and ma, he took this opportunity of expressin his attachmint to her.

If he was in love with her before, you may be sure she paid it him back agin now. Ever after the night at Ashley's, they were as tender as two tuttle-doves—witch fully accounts for the axdent what happened to me, in being kicked out of the room ; and in course I bore no mallis.

I don't know whether Miss Betsy still fancied that my master was in love with her, but she loved muffings and tea, and kem down to his parlour as much as ever.

Now comes the sing'lar part of my history.

But who was this genlman with a fine name—Mr. Frederic Altamont ? or what was he ? The most mysterus genlman that ever I knew. Once I said to him, on a wery rainy day, "Sir, shall I bring the gig down to your office ?" and he gave me one of his black looks, and one of his loudest hoaths, and told me

to mind my own business, and attend to my orders. Another day—it was on the day when Miss Mary slapped Miss Betsy's face—Miss M., who adored him, as I have said already, kep on asking him what was his buth, parentidg, and ediccation. "Dear Frederic," says she, "why this mistry about yourself and your hactions? why hide from your little Mary"—they were as tender as this, I can tell you—"your buth and your professin?"

I spose Mr. Frederic looked black, for I was *only* listening, and he said, in a voice agitated by emotion, "Mary," said he, "if you love me, ask me this no more; let it be sfisht for you to know that I am a honest man, and that a secret, what it would be misery for you to larn, must hang over all my actions—that is, from ten o'clock till six."

They went on chaffin and talking in this melumcolly and mysterus way, and I didn't lose a word of what they said, for them houses in Pentonwill have only walls made of pasteboard, and you hear rayther better outside the room than in. But, though he kep up his secret, he swore to her his affektion this day pint blank. Nothing should prevent him, he said, from leading her to the halter, from makin her his adoarable wife. After this was a slight silence. "Dearest Frederic," murmured our miss, speakin as if she was chokin, "I am yours—yours for ever." And then silence agen, and one or two smax, as if there was kissin going on. Here I thought it best to give a rattle at the door-lock; for, as I live, there was old Mrs. Shum a-walkin down the stairs!

It appears that one of the younger gals, a-lookin out of the bedrum window, had seen my master come in, and coming down to tea half an hour afterwards, said so in a cussary way. Old Mrs. Shum, who was a dragon of vertyou, cam bustling down the stairs, panting and frowning, as fat and as fierce as a old sow at feedin time.

"Where's the lodger, fellow?" says she to me.

I spoke loud enough to be heard down the street—"If you mean, ma'am, my master, Mr. Frederic Altamont, esquire, he's just stept in, and is puttin on clean shoes in his bedroom."

She said nothink in answer, but flumps past me, and opening the parlour-door, sees master looking very queer, and Miss Mary a drooping down her head like a pale lily.

"Did you come into my family," says she, "to corrupt my daughters, and to destroy the hinnocence of that infamous gal?"

Did you come here, sir, as a seducer, or only as a lodger? Speak, sir, speak!"—and she folded her arms quite fierce, and looked like Mrs. Siddums in the Tragic Mews.

"I came here, Mrs. Shum," said he, "because I loved your daughter, or I never would have condescended to live in such a beggarly hole. I have treated her in every respect like a gentleman, and she is as innocent now, ma'am, as she was when she was born. If she'll marry me, I am ready; if she'll leave you, she shall have a home where she shall be neither bullied nor starved; no hangry frumps of sisters, no cross mother-in-law, only an affectionate husband, and all the pure pleasures of Hyming."

Mary flung herself into his arms: "Dear, dear Frederic," says she, "I'll never leave you."

"Miss," says Mrs. Shum, "you ain't a Slamcoe nor yet a Buckmaster, thank God. You may marry this person if your pa thinks proper, and he may insult me—brave me—trample on my feelings in my own house—and there's no-o-o-o-body by to defend me."

I knew what she was going to be at: on came her histarrix agen, and she began screechin and roarin like mad. Down comes, of course, the eleven gals and old Shum. There was a pretty row. "Look here, sir," says she, "at the conduct of your precious trull of a daughter—alone with this man, kissin and dandling, and Lawd knows what besides."

"What, he?" cries Miss Betsy—"he in love with Mary! Oh, the wretch, the monster, the deceiver!"—and she falls down too, screeching away as loud as her mamma; for the silly creature fancied still that Altamont had a fondness for her.

"*Silence these women!*" shouts out Altamont, thundering out. "I love your daughter, Mr. Shum. I will take her without a penny, and can afford to keep her. If you don't give her to me, she'll come of her own will. Is that enough?—may I have her?"

"We'll talk of this matter, sir," says Mr. Shum, looking as high and mighty as an alderman. "Gals, go upstairs with you dear mamma." And they all trooped up again, and so the skrimmage ended.

You may be sure that old Shum was not very sorry to get a husband for his daughter Mary, for the old creature loved her better than all the pack which had been brought him or

born to him by Mrs. Buckmaster. But, strange to say, when he came to talk of settlements, and so forth, not a word would my master answer. He said he made four hundred a year reglar—he wouldn't tell how—but Mary, if she married him, must share all that he had, and ask no questions ; only this he would say, as he'd said before, that he was a honest man.

They were married in a few days, and took a very genteel house at Islington ; but still my master went away to business, and nobody knew where. Who could he be ?

If ever a young kipple in the middlin classes began life with a chance of happiness, it was Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Altamont. There house at Cannon Row, Islington, was as comfortable as house could be. Carpited from top to to ; pore's rates small ; furnitur elygant ; and three deomestix, of which I, in course, was one. My life wasn't so easy as in Mr. A.'s bachelor days ; but, what then ? The three Ws. is my maxum : plenty of work, plenty of wittles, and plenty of wages. Altamont kep his gig no longer, but went to the City in an omlibuster.

One would have thought, I say, that Mrs. A., with such an effectshnut husband, might have been as happy as her blessid majisty. Nothink of the sort. For the fust six months it was all very well ; but then she grew gloomier and gloomier, though A. did everythink in life to please her.

Old Shum used to come reglarly four times a wick to Cannon Row, where he lunched, and dined, and teed, and supd. The pore little man was a thought too fond of wine and spirits ; and many and many's the night that I've had to support him home. And you may be sure that Miss Betsy did not now desert her sister ; she was at our place mornink, noon, and night, not much to my master's liking, though he was too good-natured to wex his wife in trifles.

But Betsy never had forgotten the recollection of old days, and hated Altamont like the foul feind. She put all kinds of bad things into the head of the poor innocent missis ; who, from being all gaiety and cheerfulness, grew to be quite melumcolly and pale, and retchid, just as if she had been the most miserable woman in the world.

In three months more, a baby comes, in course, and with it old Mrs. Shum, who stuck to Mrs. side as close as a wampire, and made her retchider and retchider. She used to burst into tears when Altamont came home ; she used to sigh and wheep

over the pore child, and say, "My child, my child, your father is false to me"; or, "your father deceives me"; or, "what will you do when your pore mother is no more?" or such like sentimental stuff.

It all came from Mother Shum, and her old trix, as I soon found out. The fact is, when there is a mistry of this kind in the house, its a servant's *duty* to listen; and listen I did, one day when Mrs. was cryin as usual, and fat Mrs. Shum a-sittin consoln her, as she called it, though, heaven knows, she only grew wuss and wuss for the consolation.

Well, I listened; Mrs. Shum was a-rockin' the baby, and missis cryin as youusual.

"Pore dear innocint," says Mrs. S., heavin a great sigh, "you're the child of a unknown father, and a misrabble mother!"

"Don't speak ill of Frederic, mamma," says missis; "he is all kindness to me."

"All kindness, indeed! yes, he gives you a fine house, and a fine gownd, and a ride in a fly whenever you please; but *where does all his money come from?* Who is he—what is he? Who knows that he mayn't be a murderer, or a housebreaker, or a utterer of forged notes? How can he make his money honestly, when he won't say where he gets it? Why does he leave you eight hours every blessid day, and won't say where he goes to? Oh, Mary, Mary, you are the most injured of women!"

And with this Mrs. Shum began sobbin; and Miss Betsy began yowling like a cat in a gitter; and pore missis cried, too—tears is so remarkable infeckshus.

"Perhaps, mamma," wimpered out she, "Frederic is a shopboy, and don't like me to know that he is not a gentleman."

"A shopboy," says Betsy; "he a shopboy! Oh no, no, no! more likely a wretched willain of a murderer, stabbin and robing all day, and feedin you with the fruits of his ill-gotten games!"

More cryin and screechin here took place, in which the baby joined; and made a very pretty consort, I can tell you.

"He can't be a robber," cries missis; "he's too good, too kind, for that; besides, murdering is done at night, and Frederic is always home at eight."

"But he can be a forger," says Betsy, "a wicked, wicked forger. Why does he go away every day? to forge notes, to

be sure. Why does he go to the City? to be near the banks and places, and so do it more at his convenience."

"But he brings home a sum of money every day—about thirty shillings—sometimes fifty; and then he smiles, and says it's a good day's work. This is not like a forger," said pore Mrs. A.

"I have it—I have it!" screams out Mrs. S. "The villain—the sneaking, double-faced Jonas! he's married to somebody else, he is, and that's why he leaves you, the base biggymist!"

At this, Mrs. Altamont, struck all of a heap, fainted clean away. A dreadful business it was—histarrix; then histarrix, in course, from Mrs. Shum; bells ringin, child squalin, suvvants tearin up and down stairs with hot water! If ever there is a noosance in the world, it's a house where faintin is always going on. I wouldn't live in one—no, not to be groom of the chambers, and git two hundred a year.

It was eight o'clock in the evenin when this row took place; and such a row it was, that nobody but me heard master's knock. He came in, and heard the hooping, and screeching, and roaring. He seemed very much frightened at first, and said, "What is it?"

"Mrs. Shum's here," says I, "and Mrs. in astarrix."

Altamont looked as black as thunder, and growled out a word which I don't like to name—let it suffice that it begins with a *d* and ends with a *nation*; and he tore upstairs like mad.

He bust open the bedroom door; missis lay quite pale and stony on the sofy; the baby was screechin from the craddle; Miss Betsy was sprawlin over missis; and Mrs. Shum half on the bed and half on the ground; all howlin and squeelin, like so many dogs at the moond.

When A. came in, the mother and daughter stopped all of a sudding. There had been one or two tiffs before between them, and they feared him as if he had been a hogre.

"What's this infernal screeching and crying about?" says he.

"Oh, Mr. Altamont," cries the old woman, "you know too well; it's about you that this darling child is mistrabble!"

"And why about me, pray, madam?"

"Why, sir, dare you ask why? Because you deceive her, sir; because you are a false, cowardly traitor, sir; because *you have a wife elsewhere, sir!*" And the old lady and Miss Betsy began to roar again as loud as ever.

Altamont pawsed for a minnit, and then flung the door wide open ; nex he seized Miss Betsy as if his hand were a vice, and he world her out of the room ; then up he goes to Mrs. S. "Get up," says he thundering loud, "you lazy, trollopping, mischief-making, lying old fool ! Get up, and get out of this house. You have been the cuss and bain of my happyniss since you entered it. With your d——d lies, and novvle reading, and histerrix, you have perworted Mary, and made her almost as mad as yourself."

"My child ! my child !" shriex out Mrs. Shum, and clings round missis. But Altamont ran between them, and griping the old lady by her arm, dragged her to the door.

"Follow your daughter, ma'am," says he, and down she went. "*Chawls, see those ladies to the door,*" he hollows out, "and never let them pass it again." We walked down together, and off they went ; and master locked and double-locked the bedroom door after him, intendin, of course, to have a *tator tator* (as they say) with his wife. You may be sure that I followed upstairs again pretty quick, to hear the result of their confidence.

As they say at St. Stevenses, it was rayther a stormy debate. "Mary," says master, "you're no longer the merry, grateful gal, I knew and loved at Pentonwill ; there's some secret a-pressin on you—there's no smilin welcom for me now, as there used formly to be ! Your mother and sister-in-law have perworted you, Mary ; and that's why I've drove them from this house, which they shall not re-enter in my life."

"Oh, Frederic ! it's *you* is the cause, and not I. Why do you have any mistry from me ? Where do you spend your days ? Why did you leave me, even on the day of your marridge for eight hours, and continue to do so every day ?"

"Because," says he, "I makes my livelihood by it. I leave you, and I don't tell you *how* I make it : for it would make you none the happier to know."

It was in this way the convysation ren on—more tears and questions on my missises part, more sturmness and silence on my master's : it ended, for the first time since their marridge, in a reglar quarrel. Wery difrent, I can tell you, from all the hammerous billing and kewing which had proceeded their nupshuls.

Master went out, slamming the door in a fury ; as well he might. Says he, "If I can't have a comforable life, I can have a jolly one" ; and so he went off to the hed tavern, and came

home that evening beesly intawsicated. When high words begin in a family, drink generally follows on the genlman's side; and then, fearwell to all conjubial happyniss! These two pipple, so fond and loving, were now sirly, silent, and full of il-wil. Master went out earlier, and came home later; misses cried more, and looked even paler than before.

Well, things went on in this uncomforable way, master still in the mopes, missis tempted by the deamons of jellosoy and curoosity; until a singlar axident brought to light all the goings on of Mr. Altamont.

It was the tenth of Jennuary; I recklect the day, for old Shum gev me half a crownd (the fust and last of his money I ever see, by the way): he was dining along with master, and they were making merry together.

Master said, as he was mixing his fifth tumler of punch, and little Shum his twelfth, or so—master said, "I see you twice in the City today, Mr. Shum."

"Well, that's curous!" says Shum. "I *was* in the City. Today's the day when the divvydins (God bless 'em!) is paid; and me and Mrs. S. went for our half-year's inkem. But we only got out of the coach, crossed the street to the Bank, took our money, and got in agen. How could you see me twice?"

Altamont stuttered, and stammered, and hemd, and hawd. "Oh!" says he, "I was passing—passing as you went in and out." And he instantly turned the conversation, and began talking about pollytix, or the weather, or some such stuf.

"Yes, my dear," said my missis; "but how could you see papa *twice*?" Master didn't answer, but talked pollytix more than ever. Still she would continy on. "Where was you, my dear, when you saw pa? What were you doing, my love, to see pa twice?" and so forth. Master looked angrier and angrier, and his wife only pressed him wuss and wuss.

This was, as I said, little Shum's twelfth tumler; and I knew pritty well that he could git very little further; for, as reglar as the thirteenth came, Shum was drunk. The thirteenth did come, and its consquinzies. I was obliged to leed him home to John Street, where I left him, in the hangry arms of Mrs. Shum.

"How the d——," says he all the way, "how the d-d-d—the deddy—deddy—devil—could he have seen me *twice*?"

It was a sad slip on Altamont's part, for no sooner did he

go out the next morning than missis went out too. She tor down the street, and never stopped till she came to her pa's house, at Pentonwill. She was closited for an hour with her ma, and when she left her she drove straight to the City. She walked before the Bank, and behind the Bank, and round the Bank : she came home disperryted, having learned nothink.

And it was now an extraordinary thing, that from Shum's house, for the nex ten days, there was nothink but expyditions into the City. Mrs. S., tho her dropsiccle legs had never carred her half so fur before, was eternally on the *key vee*, as the French say. If she didn't go, Miss Betsy did, or missis did : they seemed to have an attractshun to the Bank, and went there as natral as an omliбус.

At last, one day, old Mrs. Shum comes to our house (she wasn't admitted when master was there, but came still in his absints)—and she wore a hair of tryumf as she entered.

"Mary," says she, "where is the money your husbind brought to you yesterday?" My master used always to give it to missis when he returned.

"The money, ma!" says Mary. "Why here!" And, pulling out her puss, she showed a sovrin, a good heap of silver, and an odd-looking little coin.

"*That's it!* That's it!" cried Mrs. S. "A Queen Anne's sixpence, isn't it, dear—dated seventeen hundred and three?"

It was so, sure enough : a Queen Ans sixpince of that very date.

"Now, my love," says she, "I have found him! Come with me tomorrow, and you shall *know all!*"

And now comes the end of my story.

The ladies nex morning set out for the City, and I walked behind, doing the genteel thing, with a nosegay and a goold stick. We walked down the New Road—we walked down the City Road—we walked to the Bank. We were crossing from that heddyfiz to the other side of Cornhill, when, all of a sudden, missis shrieked, and fainted spontaceously away.

I rushed forrard, and raised her to my arms ; spiling there-by a new weskit and a pair of crimpson smalcloes. I rushed forrard, I say, wery nearly knocking down the old sweeper, who was hobling away as fast as possibil. We took her to

Birch's; we provided her with a hackney-coach and every luxury, and carried her home to Islington.

That night master never came home. Nor the nex night, nor the nex. On the fourth day, an octioneer arrived; he took an infantry of the furnitur, and placed a bill in the window.

At the end of the wick, Altamont made his appearance. He was haggard, and pale; not so haggard, however, not so pale, as his miserable wife.

He looked at her very tendrilly. I may say, it's from him that I coppied *my* look to Miss ——. He looked at her very tendrilly, and held out his arms. She gev a suffycating shreek, and ~~rasht~~ into his umbraces.

"Mary," says he, "you know all now. I have sold my place; I have got three thousand pound for it, and saved two more. I've sold my house and furnitur, and that brings me another. We'll go abroad, and love each other, has formly."

And now you ask me, Who he was? I shudder to relate. —Mr. Haltamont SWEEP THE CROSSIN FROM THE BANK TO CORNHILL!!

Of cors, *I* left his servis. I met him, few years after, at Badden-Badden, where he and Mrs. A. were much respectid and pass for pipple of propaty.

HOW MR. WINKLE DISPORTED HIMSELF
ON THE ICE



CHARLES DICKENS

THE fame of Charles Dickens as a creator of humorous character began with the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, and was firmly established by the appearance of the *Pickwick Papers*, from which the amusing little extract which follows is taken. Though fashions in literature change the appeal of Dickens, seems to be immortal.

HOW MR. WINKLE DISPORTED HIMSELF ON THE ICE

“WELL, Sam,” said Mr. Pickwick, as that favoured servitor entered his bedchamber with his warm water on the morning of Christmas Day, “still frosty?”

“Water in the wash-hand basin’s a mask o’ ice, sir,” responded Sam.

“Severe weather, Sam,” observed Mr. Pickwick.

“Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar bear said to himself ven he was practising his skating,” replied Mr. Weller.

“I shall be down in a quarter of an hour, Sam,” said Mr. Pickwick, untying his nightcap.

“Wery good, sir,” replied Sam. “There’s a couple o’ Sawbones downstairs.”

“A couple of what?” exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, sitting up in bed.

“A couple o’ Sawbones,” said Sam.

“What’s a Sawbones?” inquired Mr. Pickwick, not quite certain whether it was a live animal or something to eat.

“What! Don’t you know what a Sawbones is, sir?” inquired Mr. Weller. “I thought everybody know’d as a Sawbones was a Surgeon.”

“Oh, a Surgeon, eh?” said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

“Just that, sir,” replied Sam. “These here ones as is below, though, ain’t reg’lar thorough-bred Sawbones; they’re only in trainin’.”

“In other words they’re Medical Students, I suppose?” said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam Weller nodded assent.

“I am glad of it,” said Mr. Pickwick, casting his nightcap energetically on the counterpane. “They are fine fellows, very fine fellows; with judgments matured by observation

and reflection, and tastes refined by reading and study. I am very glad of it."

"They're a-smokin' cigars by the kitchen fire," said Sam.

"Ah!" observed Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his hands, "overflowing with kindly feelings and animal spirits. Just what I like to see."

"And one on 'em," said Sam, not noticing his master's interruption—"one on 'em's got his legs on the table, and is a-drinkin' brandy neat, vile the tother one—him in the barnacles—has got a barrel o' oysters atween his knees, wich he's a-openin' like steam, and as fast as he eats 'em he takes a aim with the shells at young dropsy, who's a-sittin' down, fast asleep, in the chimbley corner."

"Eccentricities of genius, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick. "You may retire."

Sam did retire accordingly; Mr. Pickwick, at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, went down to breakfast.

"Here he is at last!" said old Wardle.—"Pickwick, this is Miss Allen's brother, Mr. Benjamin Allen. Ben we call him, and so may you if you like.—This gentleman is his very particular friend, Mr.——"

"Mr. Bob Sawyer," interposed Mr. Benjamin Allen; whereupon Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen laughed in concert.

Mr. Pickwick bowed to Bob Sawyer, and Bob Sawyer bowed to Mr. Pickwick. Bob and his very particular friend then applied themselves most assiduously to the catables before them, and Mr. Pickwick had an opportunity of glancing at them both.

Mr. Benjamin Allen was a coarse, stout, thick-set young man, with black hair cut rather short, and a white face cut rather long. He was embellished with spectacles, and wore a white neckerchief. Below his single-breasted black surtout, which was buttoned up to his chin, appeared the usual number of pepper-and-salt coloured legs, terminating in a pair of imperfectly polished boots. Although his coat was short in the sleeves, it disclosed no vestige of a linen wrist-band; and although there was quite enough of his face to admit of the encroachment of a shirt collar, it was not graced by the smallest approach to that appendage. He presented, altogether, rather a mildewy appearance, and emitted a fragrant odour of full-flavoured Cubas.

Mr. Bob Sawyer, who was habited in a coarse blue coat, which, without being either a greatcoat or a surtout, partook of the nature and qualities of both, had about him that sort of slovenly smartness and swaggering gait which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally facetious description. He wore a pair of plaid trousers, and a large, rough, double-breasted waistcoat; and out of doors carried a thick stick with a big top. He eschewed gloves, and looked, upon the whole, something like a dissipated Robinson Crusoe.

Such were the two worthies to whom Mr. Pickwick was introduced, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table on Christmas morning.

"Splendid morning, gentlemen," said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Bob Sawyer slightly nodded his assent to the proposition, and asked Mr. Benjamin Allen for the mustard.

"Have you come far this morning, gentlemen?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Blue Lion at Muggleton," briefly responded Mr. Allen.

"You should have joined us last night," said Mr. Pickwick.

"So we should," replied Bob Sawyer, "but the brandy was too good to leave in a hurry—wasn't it, Ben?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Benjamin Allen; "and the cigars were not bad, or the pork chops either—were they, Bob?"

"Decidedly not," said Bob. The particular friends resumed their attack upon the breakfast more freely than before, as if the recollection of last night's supper had imparted a new relish to the meal.

"Peg away, Bob," said Mr. Allen to his companion, encouragingly.

"So I do," replied Bob Sawyer. And so, to do him justice, he did.

"Nothing like dissecting to give one an appetite," said Mr. Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.

Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered.

"By-the-by, Bob," said Mr. Allen, "have you finished that leg yet?"

"Nearly," replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. "It's a very muscular one for a child's."

"Is it?" inquired Mr. Allen, carelessly.

"Very," said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

"I've put my name down for an arm, at our place," said Mr. Allen. "We're clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can't get hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you'd take it."

"No," replied Bob Sawyer; "can't afford expensive luxuries."

"Nonsense!" said Allen.

"Can't, indeed," rejoined Bob Sawyer. "I wouldn't mind a brain, but I couldn't stand a whole head."

"Hush, hush, gentlemen, pray," said Mr. Pickwick; "I hear the ladies."

As Mr. Pickwick spoke, the ladies, gallantly escorted by Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, returned from an early walk.

"Why, Ben!" said Arabella, in a tone which expressed more surprise than pleasure at the sight of her brother.

"Come to take you home tomorrow," replied Benjamin.

Mr. Winkle turned pale.

"Don't you see Bob Sawyer, Arabella?" inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, somewhat reproachfully. Arabella gracefully held out her hand, in acknowledgment of Bob Sawyer's presence. A thrill of hatred struck to Mr. Winkle's heart as Bob Sawyer inflicted on the proffered hand a perceptible squeeze.

"Ben, dear!" said Arabella, blushing, "have—have—you been introduced to Mr. Winkle?"

"I have not been, but I shall be very happy to be, Arabella," replied her brother, gravely. Here Mr. Allen bowed grimly to Mr. Winkle, while Mr. Winkle and Mr. Bob Sawyer glanced mutual distrust out of the corners of their eyes.

The arrival of the two new visitors, and the consequent check upon Mr. Winkle and the young lady with the fur round her boots, would in all probability have proved a very unpleasant interruption to the hilarity of the party, had not the cheerfulness of Mr. Pickwick and the good-humour of the host been exerted to the very utmost for the common weal. Mr. Winkle gradually insinuated himself into the good graces of Mr. Benjamin Allen, and even joined in a friendly conversation with Mr. Bob Sawyer, who, enlivened with the brandy, and the breakfast, and the talking, gradually ripened into a state of extreme facetiousness, and related with

much glee an agreeable anecdote about the removal of a tumour on some gentleman's head, which he illustrated by means of an oyster-knife and a half-quartern loaf, to the great edification of the assembled company. Then the whole train went to church, where Mr. Benjamin Allen fell fast asleep; while Mr. Bob Sawyer abstracted his thoughts from worldly matters by the ingenious process of carving his name on the seat of the pew, in corpulent letters of four inches long.

"Now," said Wardle, after a substantial lunch, with the agreeable items of strong-beer and cherry-brandy, had been done ample justice to, "what say you to an hour on the ice? We shall have plenty of time."

"Capital!" said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

"Prime!" ejaculated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

"You skate, of course, Winkle?" said Wardle.

"Ye-yes, oh yes," replied Mr. Winkle. "I—I—am *rather* out of practice."

"Oh, *do* skate, Mr. Winkle," said Arabella. "I like to see it so much."

"Oh, it is *so* graceful," said another young lady.

A third young lady said it was elegant, and a fourth expressed her opinion that it was "swan-like".

"I should be very happy, I'm sure," said Mr. Winkle, reddening; "but I have no skates."

This objection was at once overruled. Trundle had a couple of pair, and the fat boy announced that there were half a dozen more downstairs; whereat Mr. Winkle expressed exquisite delight, and looked exquisitely uncomfortable.

Old Wardle led the way to a pretty large sheet of ice; and the fat boy and Mr. Weller having shovelled and swept away the snow which had fallen on it during the night, Mr. Bob Sawyer adjusted his skates with a dexterity which to Mr. Winkle was perfectly marvellous, and described circles with his left leg, and cut figures of eight, and inscribed upon the ice, without once stopping for breath, a great many other pleasant and astonishing devices, to the excessive satisfaction of Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Tupman, and the ladies; which reached a pitch of positive enthusiasm when old Wardle and Benjamin Allen, assisted by the aforesaid Bob Sawyer, performed some mystic evolutions which they called a reel.

All this time Mr. Winkle, with his face and hands blue with the cold, had been forcing a gimlet into the soles of his

feet, and putting his skates on with the points behind, and getting the straps into a very complicated and entangled state, with the assistance of Mr. Snodgrass, who knew rather less about skates than a Hindoo. At length, however, with the assistance of Mr. Weller, the unfortunate skates were firmly screwed and buckled on, and Mr. Winkle was raised to his feet.

"Now, then, sir," said Sam, in an encouraging tone; "off with you, and show 'em how to do it."

"Stop, Sam, stop!" said Mr. Winkle, trembling violently and clutching hold of Sam's arms with the grasp of a drowning man. "How slippery it is, Sam!"

"Not an uncommon thing upon ice, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "Hold up, sir!"

This last observation of Mr. Weller's bore reference to a demonstration Mr. Winkle made, at the instant, of a frantic desire to throw his feet in the air and dash the back of his head on the ice.

"These—these—are very awkward skates; ain't they, Sam?" inquired Mr. Winkle, staggering.

"I'm afeerd there's a orkard gen'l'm'n in 'em, sir," replied Sam.

"Now, Winkle," cried Mr. Pickwick, quite unconscious that there was anything the matter. "Come; the ladies are all anxiety."

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Winkle, with a ghastly smile; "I'm coming."

"Just a-goin' to begin," said Sam, endeavouring to disengage himself. "Now, sir, start off!"

"Stop an instant, Sam," gasped Mr. Winkle, clinging most affectionately to Mr. Weller. "I find I've got a couple of coats at home that I don't want, Sam. You may have them, Sam."

"Thap'k'ee, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"Never mind touching your hat, Sam," said Mr. Winkle, hastily; "you needn't take your hand away to do that. I meant to have given you five shillings this morning for a Christmas-box, Sam. I'll give it you this afternoon, Sam."

"You're wery good, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"Just hold me at first, Sam; will you?" said Mr. Winkle. "There—that's right. I shall soon get in the way of it, Sam. Not too fast, Sam; not too fast."

Mr. Winkle, stooping forward with his body half doubled up, was being assisted over the ice by Mr. Weller, in a very singular and unswanlike manner, when Mr. Pickwick most innocently shouted from the opposite bank :

"Sam !"

"Sir ?" said Mr. Weller.

"Here. I want you."

"Let go, sir," said Sam. "Don't you hear the governor a-callin' ? Let go, sir."

With a violent effort, Mr. Weller disengaged himself from the grasp of the agonized Pickwickian, and in so doing administered a considerable impetus to the unhappy Mr. Winkle. With an accuracy which no degree of dexterity or practice could have ensured, that unfortunate gentleman bore swiftly down into the centre of the reel, at the very moment when Mr. Bob Sawyer was performing a flourish of unparalleled beauty. Mr. Winkle struck wildly against him, and with a loud crash they both fell heavily down. Mr. Pickwick ran to the spot. Bob Sawyer had risen to his feet, but Mr. Winkle was far too wise to do anything of the kind in skates. He was seated on the ice, making spasmodic efforts to smile, but anguish was depicted on every lineament of his countenance.

"Are you hurt ?" inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, with great anxiety.

"Not much," said Mr. Winkle, rubbing his back very hard.

"I wish you'd let me bleed you," said Mr. Benjamin, with great eagerness.

"No, thank you," replied Mr. Winkle, hurriedly.

"I really think you had better," said Allen.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Winkle, "I'd rather not."

"What do *you* think, Mr. Pickwick ?" inquired Bob Sawyer.

Mr. Pickwick was excited and indignant. He beckoned to Mr. Weller and said, in a stern voice, "Take his skates off."

"No ; but really I had scarcely begun," remonstrated Mr. Winkle.

"Take his skates off," repeated Mr. Pickwick, firmly.

The command was not to be resisted. Mr. Winkle allowed Sam to obey it in silence.

"Lift him up," said Mr. Pickwick. Sam assisted him to rise.

Mr. Pickwick retired a few paces apart from the bystanders, and beckoning his friend to approach, fixed a

searching look upon him, and uttered, in a low, but distinct and emphatic tone, these remarkable words :

"You're a humbug, sir."

"A what ?" said Mr. Winkle, starting.

"A humbug, sir. I will speak plainer, if you wish it. An impostor, sir."

With these words Mr. Pickwick turned slowly on his heel, and rejoined his friends.

While Mr. Pickwick was delivering himself of the sentiment just recorded, Mr. Weller and the fat boy, having by their joint endeavours cut out a slide, were exercising themselves thereupon in a very masterly and brilliant manner. Sam Weller, in particular, was displaying that beautiful feat of fancy sliding which is currently denominated "knocking at the cobbler's door", and which is achieved by skimming over the ice on one foot, and occasionally giving a twopenny postman's knock upon it with the other. It was a good long slide, and there was something in the motion which Mr. Pickwick, who was very cold with standing still, could not help envying.

"It looks a nice, warm exercise that, doesn't it ?" he inquired of Wardle, when that gentleman was thoroughly out of breath by reason of the indefatigable manner in which he had converted his legs into a pair of compasses, and drawn complicated problems on the ice.

"Ah, it does indeed," replied Wardle. "Do you slide ?"

"I used to do so, on the gutters, when I was a boy," replied Mr. Pickwick.

"Try it now," said Wardle.

"Oh, do, please, Mr. Pickwick !" cried all the ladies.

"I should be very happy to afford you any amusement," replied Mr. Pickwick, "but I haven't done such a thing these thirty years."

"Pooh ! Pooh ! Nonsense !" said Wardle, dragging off his skates with the impetuosity which characterized all his proceedings. "Here ; I'll keep you company. Come along !" And away went the good-tempered old fellow down the slide, with a rapidity which came very close upon Mr. Weller, and beat the fat boy all to nothing.

Mr. Pickwick paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat ; took two or three short runs, balked himself as often, and at last took another run, and went slowly

and gravely down the slide, with his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts of all the spectators.

"Keep the pot a-bilin', sir!" said Sam; and down went Wardle again, and then Mr. Pickwick, and then Sam, and then Mr. Winkle, and then Mr. Bob Sawyer, and then the fat boy, and then Mr. Snodgrass, following closely upon each other's heels, and running after each other with as much eagerness as if all their future prospects in life depended on their expedition.

It was the most intensely interesting thing to observe the manner in which Mr. Pickwick performed his share in the ceremony: to watch the torture of anxiety with which he viewed the person behind, gaining upon him at the imminent hazard of tripping him up; to see him gradually expend the painful force which he had put on at first, and turn slowly round on the slide, with his face towards the point from which he had started; to contemplate the playful smile which mantled on his face when he had accomplished the distance, and the eagerness with which he turned round when he had done so and ran after his predecessor—his black gaiters tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness and gladness through his spectacles. And when he was knocked down (which happened upon the average every third round), it was the most invigorating sight that can possibly be imagined to behold him gather up his hat, gloves, and handkerchief, with a glowing countenance, and resume his station in the rank with an ardour and enthusiasm that nothing could abate.

The sport was at its height, the sliding was at the quickest, the laughter was at the loudest, when a sharp, smart crack was heard. There was a quick rush towards the bank, a wild scream from the ladies, and a shout from Mr. Tupman. A large mass of ice disappeared; the water bubbled up over it; Mr. Pickwick's hat, gloves, and handkerchief were floating on the surface; and this was all of Mr. Pickwick that anybody could see.

Dismay and anguish were depicted on every countenance; the males turned pale, and the females fainted; Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle grasped each other by the hand, and gazed at the spot where their leader had gone down, with frenzied eagerness; while Mr. Tupman, by way of rendering the promptest assistance, and at the same time conveying to

any persons who might be within hearing the clearest possible notion of the catastrophe, ran off across the country at his utmost speed, screaming "Fire!" with all his might.

It was at this very moment, when old Wardle and Sam Weller were approaching the hole with cautious steps, and Mr. Benjamin Allen was holding a hurried consultation with Mr. Bob Sawyer on the advisability of bleeding the company generally, as an improving little bit of professional practice—it was at this very moment that a face, head, and shoulders emerged from beneath the water, and disclosed the features and spectacles of Mr. Pickwick.

"Keep yourself up for an instant—for only one instant!" bawled Mr. Snodgrass.

"Yes, do; let me implore you—for my sake!" roared Mr. Winkle, deeply affected. The adjuration was rather unnecessary—the probability being that if Mr. Pickwick had declined to keep himself up for anybody else's sake, it would have occurred to him that he might as well do so for his own.

"Do you feel the bottom there, old fellow?" said Wardle.

"Yes, certainly," replied Mr. Pickwick, wringing the water from his head and face, and gasping for breath. "I fell upon my back. I couldn't get on my feet at first."

The clay upon so much of Mr. Pickwick's coat as was yet visible bore testimony to the accuracy of this statement; and as the fears of the spectators were still further relieved by the fat boy's suddenly recollecting that the water was nowhere more than five feet deep, prodigies of valour were performed to get him out. After a vast quantity of splashing, and cracking, and struggling, Mr. Pickwick was at length fairly extricated from his unpleasant position, and once more stood on dry land.

"Oh, he'll catch his death of cold," said Emily.

"Dear old thing!" said Arabella. "Let me wrap this shawl round you, Mr. Pickwick."

"Ah, that's the best thing you can do," said Wardle; "and when you've got it on, run home as fast as your legs can carry you, and jump into bed directly."

A dozen shawls were offered on the instant. Three or four of the thickest having been selected, Mr. Pickwick was wrapped up, and started off, under the guidance of Mr. Weller—presenting the singular phenomenon of an elderly gentleman, dripping wet, and without a hat, with his arms

bound down to his sides, skimming over the ground, without any clearly defined purpose, at the rate of six good English miles an hour.

But Mr. Pickwick cared not for appearances in such an extreme case, and urged on by Sam Weller, he kept at the very top of his speed until he reached the door of Manor Farm, where Mr. Tupman had arrived some five minutes before, and had frightened the old lady into palpitations of the heart by impressing her with the unalterable conviction that the kitchen chimney was on fire—a calamity which always presented itself in glowing colours to the old lady's mind when anybody about her evinced the smallest agitation.

Mr. Pickwick paused not an instant until he was snug in bed. Sam Weller lighted a blazing fire in the room, and took up his dinner; a bowl of punch was carried up afterwards, and a grand carouse held in honour of his safety. Old Wardle would not hear of his rising, so they made the bed the chair, and Mr. Pickwick presided. A second and a third bowl were ordered in. And when Mr. Pickwick awoke next morning there was not a symptom of rheumatism about him; which proves, as Mr. Bob Sawyer very justly observed, that there is nothing like hot punch in such cases; and that if ever hot punch did fail to act as a preventive, it was merely because the patient fell into the vulgar error of not taking enough of it.

FATHER WAKES UP THE VILLAGE



CLARENCE DAY

FATHER WAKES UP THE VILLAGE

ONE of the most disgraceful features of life in the country, Father often declared, was the general inefficiency and slackness of small village tradesmen. He said he had originally supposed that such men were interested in business, and that that was why they had opened their shops and sunk capital in them, but no, they never used them for anything but gossip and sleep. They took no interest in civilized ways. Hadn't heard of them, probably. He said that of course if he were camping out on the veldt or the tundra, he would expect few conveniences in the neighbourhood and would do his best to forgo them, but why should he be confronted with the wilds twenty miles from New York?

Usually, when Father talked this way, he was thinking of ice. He strongly objected to spending even one day of his life without a glass of cold water beside his plate at every meal. There was never any difficulty about this in our home in the city. A great silver ice-water pitcher stood on the sideboard all day, and when Father was home its outer surface was frosted with cold. When he had gone to the office, the ice was allowed to melt sometimes, and the water got warmish, but never in the evening, or on Sundays, when Father might want some. He said he liked water, he told us it was one of Nature's best gifts, but he said that like all her gifts it was unfit for human consumption unless served in a suitable manner. And the only right way to serve water was icy cold.

It was still more important that each kind of wine should be served at whatever the right temperature was for it. And kept at it, too. No civilized man would take dinner without wine, Father said, and no man who knew the first thing about it would keep his wine in hot cellars. Mother thought this was a mere whim of Father's. She said he was fussy. How about people who lived in apartments, she asked

him, who didn't have cellars? Father replied that civilized persons didn't live in apartments.

One of the first summers that Father ever spent in the country, he rented a furnished house in Irvington on the Hudson, not far from New York. It had a garden, a stable, and one or two acres of woods, and Father arranged to camp out there with many misgivings. He took a train for New York every morning at eight-ten, after breakfast, and he got back between five and six, bringing anything special we might need along with him, such as a basket of peaches from the city, or a fresh package of his own private coffee.

Things went well until one day in August the ice-man didn't come. It was hot, he and his horses were tired, and he hated to come to us anyhow because the house we had rented was perched up on top of a hill. He said afterward that on this particular day he had not liked the idea of making his horses drag the big ice-wagon up that sharp and steep road to sell us fifty cents' worth of ice. Besides, all his ice was gone anyhow—the heat had melted it on him. He had four or five other good reasons. So he didn't come.

Father was in town. The rest of us waited in astonishment, wondering what could be the matter. We were so used to the regularity and punctilio of life in the city that it seemed unbelievable to us that the ice-man would fail to appear. We discussed it at lunch. Mother said that the minute he arrived she would have to give him a talking to. After lunch had been over an hour and he still hadn't come, she got so worried about what Father would say that she decided to send to the village.

There was no telephone, of course. There were no motors. She would have liked to spare the horse if she could, for he had been worked hard that week. But as this was a crisis, she sent for Morgan, the coachman, and told him to bring up the dog-cart.

The big English dog-cart arrived. Two of us boys and the coachman drove off. The sun beat down on our heads. Where the heavy harness was rubbing on Brownie's coat, he broke out into a thick, whitish lather. Morgan was sullen. When we boys were along he couldn't take off his stiff black high hat or unbutton his thick, padded coat. Worse still, from his point of view, he couldn't stop at a bar for a drink. That was why Mother had sent us along with him, of course, and he knew it.

We arrived at the little town after a while and I went into the Coal & Ice Office. A wiry-looking old clerk was dozing in a corner, his chair tilted back and his chin resting on his dingy shirt-front. I woke this clerk up. I told him about the crisis at our house.

He listened unwillingly, and when I had finished he said it was a very hot day.

I waited. He spat. He said he didn't see what he could do, because the ice-house was locked.

I explained earnestly that this was the Day family and that something must be done right away.

He hunted around his desk a few minutes, found his chewing tobacco, and said, "Well, sonny, I'll see what I can do about it."

I thanked him very much, as that seemed to me to settle the matter. I went back to the dog-cart. Brownie's check-rein had been unhooked, and he stood with his head hanging down. He looked sloppy. It wouldn't have been so bad with a buggy, but a slumpy horse in a dog-cart can look pretty awful. Also, Morgan was gone. He reappeared soon, coming out of a side door down the street, buttoning up his coat, but with his hat tilted back. He looked worse than the horse.

We checked up the weary animal's head again and drove slowly home. A hot little breeze in our rear moved our dust along with us. At the foot of the hill we boys got out, to spare Brownie our extra weight. We unhooked his check-rein again. He dragged the heavy cart up.

Mother was sitting out on the piazza. I said the ice would come soon now. We waited.

It was a long afternoon.

At five o'clock Brownie was hitched up again. The coachman and I drove back to the village. We had to meet Father's train. We also had to break the bad news to him that he would have no ice-water for dinner, and that there didn't seem to be any way to chill his Rhine wine.

The village was as sleepy as ever, but when Father arrived and learned what the situation was, he said it would have to wake up. He told me that he had had a long, trying day at the office, the city was hotter than the Desert of Sahara, and he was completely worn out, but that if any ice-man imagined for a moment he could behave in that manner, he,

Father, would take his damned head off. He strode into the Coal & Ice Office.

When he came out, he had the clerk with him, and the clerk had put on his hat and was vainly trying to calm Father down. He was promising that he himself would come with the ice-wagon if the driver had left, and deliver all the ice we could use, and he'd be there inside an hour.

Father said, "Inside of an hour be hanged; you'll have to come quicker than that!"

The clerk got rebellious. He pointed out that he'd have to go to the stables and hitch up the horses himself, and then get someone to help him hoist a block of ice out of the ice-house. He said it was 'most time for his supper and he wasn't used to such work. He was only doing it as a favour to Father. He was just being neighbourly.

Father said he'd have to be neighbourly in a hurry, because he wouldn't stand it, and he didn't know what the devil the ice company meant by such actions.

The clerk said it wasn't his fault, was it? It was the driver's.

This was poor tactics, of course, because it wound Father up again. He wasn't interested in whose fault it was, he said. It was everybody's. What he wanted was ice and plenty of it, and he wanted it in time for his dinner. A small crowd which had collected by this time listened admiringly as Father shook his finger at the clerk and said he dined at six-thirty.

The clerk went loping off towards the stables to hitch up the big horses. Father waited till he'd turned the corner.

Followed by the crowd, Father marched to the butcher's.

After nearly a quarter of an hour, the butcher and his assistant came out, unwillingly carrying what seemed to be a coffin wrapped in a black mackintosh. It was a huge cake of ice.

Father got in, in front, sat on the box seat beside me, and took up the reins. We drove off. The coachman was on the rear seat, sitting back-to-back to us, keeping the ice from sliding out with the calves of his legs. Father went a few doors up the street to a little house-furnishing shop and got out again.

I went in the shop with him this time. I didn't want to miss any further scenes of this performance. Father

began proceedings by demanding to see all the man's ice-boxes. There were only a few. Father selected the largest he had. Then, when the sale seemed arranged, and when the proprietor was smiling broadly with pleasure at this sudden windfall, Father said he was buying that refrigerator only on two conditions.

The first was that it had to be delivered at his home before dinner. Yes, now. Right away. The shopkeeper explained over and over that this was impossible, but that he'd have it up the next morning, sure. Father said no, he didn't want it the next morning, he had to have it at once. He added that he dined at six-thirty, and that there was no time to waste.

The shopkeeper gave in.

The second condition, which was then put to him firmly, was staggering. Father announced that that ice-box must be delivered to him full of ice.

The man said he was not in the ice business.

Father said, "Very well then. I don't want it."

The man said obstinately that it was an excellent ice-box.

Father made a short speech. It was the one that we had heard so often at home about the slackness of village tradesmen, and he put such strong emotion and scorn in it that his voice rang through the shop. He closed it by saying, "An ice-box is of no use to a man without ice, and if you haven't the enterprise, the gumption, to sell your damned goods to a customer who wants them delivered in condition to use, you had better shut up your shop and be done with it. Not in the ice business, hey? You aren't in business at all!" He strode out.

The dealer came to the door just as Father was getting into the dog-cart, and called out anxiously, "All right, Mr. Day. I'll get that refrigerator filled for you and send it up right away."

Father drove quickly home. A thunderstorm seemed to be brewing, and this had waked Brownie up, or else Father was putting some of his own supply of energy into him. The poor old boy probably needed it as again he climbed the steep hill. I got out at the foot, and as I walked along behind I saw that Morgan was looking kind of desperate, trying to sit in the correct position with his arms folded while he held in the ice with his legs. The big cake was continually

slipping and sliding around under the seat and doing its best to plunge out. It had bumped against his calves all the way home. They must have got good and cold.

When the dog-cart drew up at our door, Father remained seated a moment while Morgan, the waitress, and I pulled and pushed at the ice. The mackintosh had come off it by this time. We dumped it out on the grass. A little later, after Morgan had unharnessed and hurriedly rubbed down the horse, he ran back to help us boys break the cake up, push the chunks around to the back door, and cram them into the ice-box while Father was dressing for dinner.

Mother had calmed down by this time. The Rhine wine was cooling. "Don't get it too cold," Father called.

Then the ice-man arrived.

The old clerk was with him, like a warden in charge of a prisoner. Mother stepped out to meet them, and at once gave the ice-man the scolding that had been waiting for him all day.

The clerk asked how much ice we wanted. Mother said we didn't want any now. Mr. Day had brought home some, and we had no room for more in the ice-box.

The ice-man looked at the clerk. The clerk tried to speak, but no words came.

Father put his head out of the window. "Take a hundred pounds, Vinnie," he said. "There's another box coming."

A hundred-pound block was brought into the house and heaved into the washtub. The waitress put the mackintosh over it. The ice-wagon left.

Just as we all sat down to dinner the new ice-box arrived, full.

Mother was provoked. She said, "Really, Clare!" crossly. "Now what am I to do with that piece that's waiting out in the washtub?"

Father chuckled.

She told him he didn't know the first thing about keeping house, and went out to the laundry with the waitress to tackle the problem. The thunderstorm broke and crashed. We boys ran around shutting the windows upstairs.

Father's soul was at peace. He dined well, and he had his coffee and cognac served to him on the piazza. The storm was over by then. Father snuffed a deep breath of the sweet-smelling air and smoked his evening cigar.

"Clarence," he said, "King Solomon had the right idea about these things. 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,' Solomon said, 'do thy damndest.'"

Mother called me inside. "Whose mackintosh is that?" she asked anxiously. "Katie's torn a hole in the back."

I heard Father saying contentedly on the piazza, "I like plenty of ice."

THE EEL



GEORGE RESTON MALLOCH

GEORGE RESTON MALLOCH is chiefly known as a playwright and a poet. Several of his plays have been produced at the Scottish National Theatre. He is also a well-known short-story writer and contributes regularly to magazines both here and in America.

THE BELL

ABOUT ten o'clock on a glorious May morning, Andrew McTochie, of Windy Mains Farm, emerged from the lane and paused on the high road for a moment to contemplate the view. It was a beautiful prospect that lay before him, bathed in sunshine. The high road ran straight as a die down to the valley of the Wimple Burn. On its upper side it was flanked by the well-cultivated fields that spoke of Andrew's skill as a farmer, and on the lower by a slope of reedy pasture.

As he gazed with satisfaction at his two-acre field of oats on the bank of the Wimple, he was joined by Sandy McGrowther, the cattle-dealer.

"Ay, ye've done no sae bad there, Andra," said Mr. McGrowther, knowing what was most likely to be the object of the other's gaze.

"No sae bad," admitted Mr. McTochie.

"We nicht just step alang tae the public and hae a wee hauf-yin," he suggested. Whereupon they turned their backs upon the prospect below and a few minutes later entered the local inn, where they spent more than an hour consuming successive "hauf-yins". Thus they missed such an exciting event as the passing of a stranger through the village.

Mr. Peter Grant, O.B.E., had walked five miles from the local station for the particular purpose of enjoying the view. He had not looked on it for thirty years, and it meant much to him, for it had been the scene of many boyish exploits and adventures.

Peter Grant had sought his fortune in the south, and had found it so abundantly that he now thought of retiring from business and buying an estate in the neighbourhood. But difficulties had arisen in connection with his purchase, owing to certain claims to mineral rights made by two neighbouring magnates, the Earl of Kilbagie and Sir John Blanecapple.

Grant had endeavoured to buy them out at a fair price,

but the lawyers' negotiations had been fruitless; and Grant in his office in Lombard Street had thought them a couple of bloodsuckers, while they on their part had been heard to refer to him as a parsimonious moneylender who thought he was going to put a smart deal over the local hayseeds.

But the same rights were also a matter of dispute between Kilbagie and Blancapple, and altogether it would have been hard to find any three men on that fine May morning less cordially disposed to one another. Grant had journeyed from London to beard Kilbagie and Blancapple in their dens and thresh the matter out.

As he swung down the hill, Grant felt ridiculously young and happy. He loved this bit of country. There was the farm and there was the quarry on the hillside—still working, by Jove! And there, best of all, there was the old Wimple Burn still purling along as of yore, down the hill, under the bridge, and away through the reedy pasture.

Grant stopped to look over the parapet into the stream below, for was this not the stream of his boyish days in which he had caught minnows in a net, trout with a worm, and eels anyhow? But eels, he remembered, as he looked down into the familiar pool, were most excitingly caught by the process known as guddling, which consisted in wading up-stream or stepping from stone to stone and dislodging the prey by the hand or with a stick from under any likely stone or crevice. Your skilful guddler was able to seize the slippery eel in his hands and throw it to the bank. As his thoughts ran back, a reminiscent look appeared in the eyes of this portly gentleman. He wondered—yes, he wondered whether eels were still as plentiful in the Wimple. Why shouldn't one have a look? Casting a careful glance up and down the road, he satisfied himself that no one was in sight, left the bridge, and walked down the bank of the burn.

Cautiously descending the steep bank, he found himself on the scene of a hundred memories. Something stirred in the pool, causing a slight swirl in the water, and an unwonted tingle of excitement ran through the frame of Mr. Peter Grant, O.B.E. He stepped cautiously on to a flat stone and gently inserted the top of his stick into a likely crevice.

As he did so, he was startled by a voice which addressed him from the opposite bank. It was a rich and fruity voice, and it said quite pleasantly :

"Hello, what on earth are you after?"

Looking up with a haste which almost unbalanced him, Grant saw a stout figure in plus-fours surmounted by a highly coloured face, which in its turn was adorned by a fierce white moustache. He recognized, from the photographs in Society weeklies, that he had been taken at somewhat of a disadvantage by one of his enemies; by none other, in fact, than Sir John Blancapple. He did not feel entirely dignified, balancing himself precariously on a flat stone in mid-stream. He answered with an affectation of carelessness:

"Oh—interested in natural history and that sort of thing. Studying eels."

"Eels, eh?" replied Sir John. "Suppose there are plenty there?"

"Used to be hundreds."

"You know the burn, then?"

"Rather. I used to guddle for eels and trout here when I was a kid."

"Eels, eh?" pursued Sir John reflectively. "Guddle for eels and trout, eh? Why, bless my soul, so did I, many a time. But," he added, "this wasn't the best place, you know."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Grant. "You see that crack in the rock there? There used to be dozens in that. Just you watch what happens when I put my stick in."

"Here, wait a moment," said Sir John hastily. "Let me get down." And he lowered himself down the bank in ponderous fashion.

Grant inserted the point of his stick. Nothing happened.

"I thought not," said the Baronet. "I'm pretty sure that's not the right place."

"I'm pretty sure it is," was the answer, "only this stick is too thick to get right back. Now if I had a long twig, that would fetch them out."

A curious look dawned on Sir John's face. Slowly he produced a pocket-knife and solemnly cut a willow wand from the tree against which he was leaning. A slight excitement marked his countenance as he handed it to Grant. Grant inserted the twig. An eel shot out.

"By Jove!" said the Baronet, and instinctively made a grab at the wriggling shape, only to stub his fingers on the

stone. Another and another followed until the lair was empty. Then both men laughed a little guiltily.

"Oh, I always knew there were some there," observed Sir John, "but I'd lay you any odds that there are far more in the round hole a little farther up. That's where I used to get them."

"Right," said Grant. "Suppose we try it? There's no one in sight," he added apologetically.

"Well, just out of curiosity," said the Baronet, who was really getting rather excited; and they clambered a little way up the bed of the stream till they came to a similar spot just below the bridge.

"I don't know this place so well," said Grant, "but I suppose it's that little pot-hole you mean?"

"Yes; look here, let me have the twig this time. I think I remember the trick of it," said the owner of Blancapple, and, taking up his position on a stone in mid-stream, he proceeded to expel the tenants of the pot-hole.

Thirty years of London fell away like a cloak from the shoulders of Mr. Peter Grant, O.B.E., as elvers of all sizes began to dash from their place of concealment. His boyish instincts proved too strong for him, and, crouching down beside his companion, he made grab after grab at the slippery creatures and succeeded in tossing several to the bank.

Excitement is contagious, and Sir John, strangely delighted with his success, and at having demonstrated to the stranger his superior knowledge of the haunts of the eel in the Wimple Burn, leant forward to explore another recess with the twig. As he did so he disturbed a monster eel. With a splash and a wriggle it made its way up-stream to the shelter of the deep pool under the bridge.

"By gad, sir!" exclaimed the Baronet. "Did you see that?"

"A whopper," cried Grant.

"Four feet if it was an inch," said Sir John, who was not lacking in imaginative power.

"I should have said four and a half," contested Grant.

"Let's see where he's gone," said the Baronet, stepping cautiously from stone to stone, followed by his companion. Balancing himself carefully, he crouched down and, shading his eyes with one hand, peered into the murky depths of the pool before him. The Fourteenth Baronet of Blancapple was a heavy man, and it was some forty years since he had

tried to balance himself in a crouching position on a small stone in the middle of a burn. His feet suddenly shot out from under him, and he sat down heavily in six inches of water.

Now it happened that some few minutes previously the ponderous gates of the domain of Kilbagie had been swung open to permit the egress of a Rolls-Royce car, at the wheel of which was seated no less a person than General the Earl of Kilbagie. By his side, in a respectful attitude, sat Turner, his trusted head chauffeur. The car swung into the high road and purred softly down the hill towards the bridge over the Wimple Burn. Its aristocratic owner was bound for a meeting of the local Territorial Association, and was in full uniform, plentifully be-medalled. As the car approached the bridge his lordship was surprised to observe two figures in somewhat peculiar attitudes in the bed of the burn. One of them seemed familiar.

"Looks like Blancapple," said his lordship. "But who's the other?"

"I think, my lord," said Turner respectfully, "that it is undoubtedly Sir John Blancapple. The other gentleman is, I think, a stranger."

As the car rolled silently up to the bridge the Earl's curiosity became too strong for him and, pulling up, he got out. He approached the parapet and, leaning over, was greeted by the astonishing spectacle of his dignified neighbour seated in mid-stream. The spectacle did not, however, displease him, for he considered that he had several little scores to pay off with Blancapple; and he proceeded to take a mean advantage of his neighbour's situation.

"Why, what on earth, Blancapple, are you doing in the middle of the burn?"

The Baronet, who was about to rise, suspended the difficult operation for a moment to glare at the interrupter.

"Confound it, sir," he said, with some acerbity, "it's my own burn, isn't it? A man may sit in his own burn if he likes, I suppose?"

"Quite, quite," responded the Earl of Kilbagie blandly, as the other heaved himself up. "Quite. I only wondered why you were doing it."

"Why I am doing it?" shouted the Baronet angrily, and then finished somewhat lamely, for the explanation struck

him, as he gave it, as somewhat unequal to the situation. "We're after an eel."

"And what on earth," pursued the Earl with great interest, "do you want an eel for?"

"This isn't an eel," Grant put in, fearing that the Baronet was being tried too far. "It's not an ordinary eel—it's a monster!"

"A monster, eh?"

Now there must have been some magic bestowed by the invisible powers upon the word *eel* this bright May morning, for a reminiscent look, which by now was familiar to the Baronet and Grant, began to dawn in the eyes of Lord Kilbagie. Far, far away across the burning sands of India, across the Egyptian deserts and through the smoke of battle in France, General the Earl of Kilbagie caught a glimpse of a small boyish figure, clad in a velvet suit, with a white lace collar, who had once been in the habit of escaping from nurses to hunt for monster eels in the Wimple Burn. He was silent for a moment.

"A monster, eh?"

"Five feet at least," said Grant.

"I should say seven," said the Baronet. "More like a conger than a fresh-water eel."

"I must have a look at this chap," said Lord Kilbagie, and, coming round the end of the parapet, he descended the bank.

Meanwhile Fate was bringing another instrument upon the scene to aid in the perfecting of its design. A cart loaded with finely broken stone for road repair came lumbering slowly down the hill, the carter trudging by the side of his horse. As it reached the bridge, the carter, seeing the well-known Kilbagie car at rest and hearing a murmur of voices from somewhere, decided that he might as well pull up. He did so.

Lord Kilbagie, despite his distinguished position in the eyes of the county, was after all a man; that is to say, a rather carefully disguised boy. He joined the other two on the stones under the shadow of the bridge. The Baronet was on his knees peering into the pool.

"There he is, by Jove!"

Following his pointing finger, the Earl saw with some excitement the head of an enormous eel protruding from beneath a stone some eighteen inches under the surface.

"By gad!" said his lordship. "He is a big fellow!"

"How the deuce are we to get him out, though?" asked Blancapple anxiously.

"You can't. You'll never budge him from that stone," said the Earl.

"Can't?" snorted the Baronet. "We must, and, by gad, we shall! Are you going to let yourself be defied by an eel?"

Lord Kilbagie weakened.

"I don't see how you are going to do it, though."

"Tell you what," said Grant. "If we only had a hook of some kind, we could bare-hook him—let it down under his chin, you know, and then jerk him out."

"That's a poacher's dodge," said the Earl doubtfully. "And, anyway, you haven't a hook."

"Has anyone a tie-pin?" asked Grant. "We could twist it up, and I've got a bit of string in my pocket."

The Earl became suddenly aware that he was the only one of the three wearing a tie-pin. The others seemed to be looking at him with confidence. Reluctantly he undid the pin and handed it to Grant.

Grant had it bent into the shape of a hook and attached to his string in no time; so there was nothing for it but to kneel beside the Baronet and watch his attempts to beguile the eel into the belief that his chin was being tickled by a benevolent friend. Whether it was due to the lack of a barb or because it was too blunt, the operation met with no result.

It became obvious that the Baronet was a bungler.

"Let me have a shot at it," said the Earl of Kilbagie. And he had several shots with no better result.

"Ye'll no do it that way," said the voice of the carter, who had now joined the group. "Man, the ony way tae get him oot o' that is tae get a grup on him roond the gills wi' a finger an' drag him oot."

The Baronet considered this for a moment and then, rolling up his sleeve, made the attempt. But after a confused struggle the eel suddenly shot away into farther deeps.

"We'll have to give it up," said the Earl with a feeling of relief.

"Dashed if we do!" said the Baronet. "I'll get that eel if I spend a week here."

It was at this moment that Turner intervened with fatal advice.

"Begging your lordship's pardon, but I have observed that the stream comes to a very narrow point immediately above the bridge, between two rocks. If we had a few boards, a temporary dam could easily be made there and then the removal of a few stones at this end would practically empty the pool."

"Good idea!" exclaimed the Baronet. The Earl groaned. He knew Turner. Turner had served under him in the Royal Engineers, and Turner was never happier than when he was building a dam or inventing an excuse for some other engineering feat. Still, there it was. He couldn't desert Blancapple at this crisis. General the Earl of Kilbagie took charge of the operations.

"Ye havena a board," objected the carter.

"What's the matter with the backboard of your cart, my man?" demanded the General.

"Ma load wad slip oot if ye took that aff."

"Nonsense! Unhitch the horse and let the cart down on its shafts."

Now the word of Kilbagie was law unto the carter. The horse was released, and the cart tipped forward as directed. Turner and the carter climbed down with the board and proceeded to fix it in the required position.

"That'll dae fine," said the carter, who was beginning to enjoy himself. "It's got kin' o' wedged in a bit crack. Naethin'll stir yon." This was truer than anyone supposed. But the bottom of the burn was far from level, and it was soon evident that the bulk of the stream was escaping beneath the improvised dam.

"It wants backing of some kind," said the General.

"A load of macadam would serve the purpose very well, your lordship," suggested Turner tentatively.

"Here . . ." began the carter, but quailed before the light of battle in the General's eye.

"Take hold of the shafts and back the cart to the water's edge," rapped out the General.

Willing hands carried out the command.

"Tip it in!" They tipped it in. With a mighty *splash* the load of macadam descended on the water. It fell well and truly against the board; and in a moment the slackened

flow made it apparent that here was at least a temporarily effective dam.

The carter was told off to strengthen it by the addition of a layer of sods, and, well pleased with the result of their efforts, the rest of the party now returned to the other side of the bridge, where, by deepening the exit of the pool, they very soon had reduced the depth of water considerably. This operation took some little time, however, and then the eel had to be rediscovered. When it was at last located, Turner was placed at the now narrow exit to cut off any attempt at escape, while the Baronet and Grant, in their shirt-sleeves, began a long series of attempts to "get a grup" on the gills of the elusive and slippery fish.

From stone to stone, from end to end of the pool dashed the eel. Again and again eager fingers closed on a slimy body, only to feel it escape them. The combat was heroic, and the human combatants, egged on by the advice and direction of Lord Kilbagie, who had chosen a comparatively dry point of vantage, soon became almost as wet and slimy as the eel. The minutes flew unnoticed until the contest was interrupted at last by the appearance of the carter. There was something like a grin on the man's face.

"Man," he stuttered as he joined the group under the bridge, "if yon sicht disna' fair ding a' l!"

"What sight?" demanded the Earl.

"Weel, ma loard, the sicht o' a wheen o' ducks sailin' aboot Andra McTochie's prize oats."

"What do you mean? Ducks in the oats? What's that got to do with us?" said the Baronet, looking up in astonishment.

"A'weel, ye see, Sir John," said the man with a chuckle, "ye're bit dam has made the burnie rin ower its bank intae Andra's oat-field."

"McTochie's prize oats!" gasped the dismayed Baronet. Andrew was his tenant.

"McTochie's oats!" said the Earl, who was president of the local farmers' association. "This must be stopped!" Hastily he led the way back to the dam. A terrible sight met their eyes. McTochie's cherished field was rapidly becoming a lake, and, to add to the horror of the scene, McTochie's ducks, no doubt attracted from the burn by the pleasing prospect, were sailing calmly about and grubbing up bunches of the young stuff with every sign of enjoyment.

The Earl groaned and the Baronet with him. They knew Andrew McTochie.

"We must shift the dam at once," commanded Lord Kilbagie.

"You'll hae a job tae dae that," said the carter as a man who knew.

However, he descended with Turner and endeavoured to dislodge the barrier. Their efforts were in vain even with the assistance of Grant and the Baronet.

"Ye'll never shift yon," repeated the carter.

"I'm very much afraid, your lordship," said Turner, "that the man is right."

"Something must be done," snapped the Earl despairingly.

"Yes, my lord," replied Turner respectfully. "If we only had a hand-grenade now, we might blow the whole thing up in a jiffy."

"But we haven't got one, damn it, man!"

Here the carter intervened.

"Am thinkin', ma loard, that Mr. Turner's richt. Noo, if we wis tae pit a bit stick o' blasting pouter aneath yin o' they big stanes, we micht shift the whole thing."

"Quite, quite, my man," responded his lordship irritably, "but we haven't got any blasting powder; and, if we had, we should want a fuse."

"Maybe we've got baith," said the carter darkly. "The fac' is A borrowed a wee bittie frae MacAndrew up at the quarry for to blow up yon big tree on ma allotment. Noo, if nae questions are to be asked as to hoo A cam' by it, A wouldn't refuse it."

A light of relief dawned upon the faces of the Earl and the Baronet. They assured the carter that no questions would be asked and that the matter of a reward might even be considered, if he and Turner would quickly lay the mine and fuse. This did not take very long to do.

But unfortunately it was at this moment that the Fourteenth Baronet of Blancapple remembered that he had been defied by an eel, and at his urgent entreaty the firing of the fuse was delayed in order to give him a last chance of getting "a grup" on the gills of his enemy, for which purpose he left the others and retired beneath the bridge.

We must now return to Andrew McTochie and to the kitchen of Windy Mains Farm, where he burst in upon his

astonished wife, pale and shaking and smelling strongly of the refreshment which he had been consuming in company with his friend the cattle-dealer.

"Mirren," he cried, "am A seein richt? For as sure as A've twa een in me heid when A come up the road to the hoose the noo, A saw a wheen of white duck swimmin' about on the twa-acre oats."

Mirren sniffed the air suspiciously.

"It's well seen where you've been, Andra," she replied, going on with her baking. "Ay, you'll have got it at last just as the meenister has warned ye time and again. Ducks swimmin' in the oat-field, indeed! Na, na, Andra—the ducks you've seen are swimmin' in the whusky you've been drinkin'. It's a judgment on ye."

Andrew groaned, and staggered from the kitchen. He knew well that he had taken more than was good for him, and he asked himself with horror if the minister's warning of delirium tremens might have come true at last. But in his half-drunken condition he conceived the idea of putting the matter to test, and, taking down his gun from the wall, he staggered forth and made for the two-acre field.

"Ducks," he muttered to himself. "Ay, there's ducks right enough and every yin of them a double duck, sac far as I can see. Ay, and there's men there and every yin of them a double man. Double or single, A'll test it. A'll let fly wi' baith barrels into the midst o' them. If they're ducks they'll flee, if they're men they'll rin. If they dinna flee and dinna rin, then they're no there, and Andrew McTochie's got the D.Ts. at last. Ay, that's what it comes to."

So communing with himself, Mr. McTochie staggered deviously towards the phantom lake.

Such is the spirit of comradeship which all true sport inspires in its devotees, that Lord Kilbagie was chatting amicably with the carter, from whom he had just borrowed a wax vesta to light his cheroot, when the conversation was suddenly interrupted by Turner, who in the excitement of the moment fell into old military habits and, drawing himself stiffly to attention, saluted smartly as he addressed the General, the Earl of Kilbagie.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Turner, "but I fear that we are about to come under fire from the field on the left."

The startled Earl looked up and saw the drunken figure

of McTochie brandishing a gun and shouting what sounded like threats.

"Good Lord !" said the Earl. "The man's drunk."

"Ay, he's fou'," said the carter, "and he means mischief wi' that gun."

"Tut, tut," said his lordship. "He'd never dare to shoot."

"When Andra's fou' there's no sayin' whit he wouldna dae, ma loard," said the carter earnestly. "We's best all git aneath the brig till we see whit he does."

Now, his lordship had just struck the wax match when the carter thus addressed him, and as he listened and stared at the advancing figure of McTochie, he dropped it with a hasty exclamation. In the excitement of the moment no one noticed that it had fallen close to the end of the fuse, and Grant and Turner, adding their advice to that of the carter, half persuaded and half dragged Lord Kilbagie across the road and under the shelter of the bridge, where they were concealed from the advancing McTochie. That worthy, who had been engaged looking to the loading of his gun, saw with astonishment when he raised his eyes again that those figures which he had taken for solid men had vanished from the face of the earth. His knees shook beneath him with horror.

"Vanished clean aff the airth," he muttered. "Ay, maybe they wisna there, but they bluidy double ducks is still there, swimmin' aboot whaur me oats wis growin'. A'll test them at ony rate."

And raising his gun he took unsteady aim and discharged both barrels. The shots flew wide over their mark. The ducks remained undisturbed, but almost simultaneously with the discharge of the gun a dull roar smote upon McTochie's ears, and he saw rising, apparently out of the burn, a dark column of smoke and flame, mingled with flying fragments of stone and wood.

For the moment he stood transfixed. Then, casting down his gun, he gave a yell of horror, turned about, and fled. Running as fast as his condition would permit, he avoided his own house and did not stop till he burst through the gates of the manse and appeared before the astonished minister, imploring in a faint voice that he might be permitted to sign the pledge immediately. The minister did not pause to inquire into the cause of this signal act of grace. In two minutes Andrew had signed his name ; and it may be recorded

here that from that moment he was a reformed character and never touched drink again.

We must now return to the group sheltering beneath the bridge. Their first impression was that McTochie had somehow contrived to fire a six-inch shell from his gun. Then they saw the dam go up in the air and a wave of yellow water descending upon them. It was just at that moment that the Baronet had at last succeeded in getting "a grup" upon the gills of the elusive eel; but before he or any of the others could collect their senses the wave hit the bridge, foamed through it, and emerged on the other side, bearing with it the struggling figures of General the Earl of Kilbagie, Sir John Blancapple, Mr. Peter Grant, O.B.E., the eminent financier, Turner, and the carter.

As the others gradually stranded, they saw borne past them on the flood the form of Blancapple, submerged save for one arm which brandished, like another Excalibur, a struggling eel, firmly gripped by the gills between finger and thumb. As the Baronet's dripping and portly figure arose from the subsiding waters, the eely mind apparently conceived the idea that now or never must a blow be struck for liberty. And as the Baronet began a triumphal shout of "I've got the beggar!" the eel with one dexterous twist fastened itself securely round his neck, choking further utterance.

"Holy Moses! Oh, holy Moses—for God's sake, you fellows, take this thing off!" shrieked Blancapple, relaxing his grip in the horror of the moment.

But the others were now rolling about on the bank paralysed with laughter, which was not lessened when the eel, seeing an open mouth before its eyes, promptly sought refuge by inserting its head therein.

With a wild shriek Blancapple cast the slimy thing from him, and it disappeared down the current of the Wimple, where it may be living happily to this day.

Peter Grant mopped his eyes at last and said, still weak with laughter: "What a day! I've enjoyed nothing so much since I was a kid, or my name is not Peter Grant."

Kilbagie and Blancapple stared at him.

"Peter Grant!" they gasped simultaneously.

"Yes," said Peter. "Fact is, I came down here to talk it all over with you two!"

"To talk it over!" said the Earl of Kilbagie.

"To talk it over !" said Blancapple.

"Yes," said Peter, "to talk it over."

"Talk it over lunch at Kilbagie, you mean," said his lordship after a moment.

"Not a bad idea," said the Baronet. And Peter agreed.

THE DOG THAT BIT PEOPLE



JAMES THURBER

JAMES THURBER is one of the leading spirits of that inimitable American magazine *The New Yorker*. He made his name as an illustrator when he did the drawings for *Is Sex Necessary*, and later increased his public by publishing *Seal in the Bedroom* and *My Life and Hard Times*, from which the following amusing extract is taken.

THE DOG THAT BIT PEOPLE

PROBABLY no one man should have as many dogs in his life as I have had, but there was more pleasure than distress in them for me except in the case of an Airedale named Muggs. He gave me more trouble than all the other fifty-four or -five put together, although my moment of keenest embarrassment was the time a Scotch-terrier named Jeannie, who had just had six puppies in the clothes-closet of a fourth-floor apartment in New York, had the unexpected seventh and last at the corner of Eleventh Street and Fifth Avenue during a walk she had insisted on taking. Then, too, there was the prize-winning French poodle, a great big black poodle—none of your little, untroublesome white miniatures—who got sick riding in the rumble-seat of a car with me on her way to the Greenwich Dog Show. She had a red rubber bib tucked around her throat and, since a rain-storm came up when we were half way through the Bronx, I had to hold over her a small green umbrella, really more of a parasol. The rain beat down fearfully and suddenly the driver of the car drove into a big garage filled with mechanics. It happened so quickly that I forgot to put the umbrella down, and I will always remember, with sickening distress, the look of incredulity mixed with hatred that came over the face of the particular hardened garage-man that came over to see what we wanted, when he took a look at me and the poodle. All garage-men, and people of that intolerant stripe, hate poodles with their curious hair-cut, especially the pom-poms that you got to leave on their hips if you expect the dogs to win a prize.

But the Airedale, as I have said, was the worst of all my dogs. He really wasn't my dog, as a matter of fact: I came home from a vacation one summer to find that my brother Roy had bought him while I was away. A big, burly, choleric dog, he always acted as if he thought I wasn't one of the family. There was a slight advantage in being one of the

family, for he didn't bite the family as often as he bit strangers. Still, in the years that we had him he bit everybody but mother, and he made a pass at her once but missed. That was during the month when we suddenly had mice, and Muggs refused to do anything about them. Nobody ever had mice exactly like the mice we had that month. They acted like pet mice, almost like mice somebody had trained. They were so friendly that one night when mother entertained at dinner the Friraliras, a club she and my father had belonged to for twenty years, she put down a lot of little dishes with food in them on the pantry floor so that the mice would be satisfied with that and wouldn't come into the dining-room. Muggs stayed out in the pantry with the mice, lying on the floor, growling to himself—not at the mice, but about all the people in the next room that he would have liked to get at. Mother slipped out into the pantry once to see how everything was going. Everything was going fine. It made her so mad to see Muggs lying there, oblivious of the mice—they came running up to her—that she slapped him and he slashed at her, but didn't make it. He was sorry immediately, mother said. He was always sorry, she said, after he bit someone, but we could not understand how she figured this out. He didn't act sorry.

Mother used to send a box of candy every Christmas to the people the Airedale bit. The list finally contained forty or more names. Nobody could understand why we didn't get rid of the dog. I didn't understand it very well myself, but we didn't get rid of him. I think that one or two people tried to poison Muggs—he acted poisoned once in a while—and old Major Moberly fired at him once with his Service revolver near the Seneca Hotel in East Broad Street—but Muggs lived to be almost eleven years old and even when he could hardly get around he bit a Congressman who had called to see my father on business. My mother had never liked the Congressman—she said the signs of his horoscope showed he couldn't be trusted (he was Saturn with the moon in Virgo)—but she sent him a box of candy that Christmas. He sent it right back, probably because he suspected it was trick candy. Mother persuaded herself it was all for the best that the dog had bitten him, even though father lost an important business association because of it. "I wouldn't be associated with such a man," mother said. "Muggs could read him like a book."

We used to take turns feeding Muggs to be on his good side

but that didn't always work. He was never in a very good humour, even after a meal. Nobody knew exactly what was the matter with him, but whatever it was it made him irascible, especially in the mornings. Roy never felt very well in the morning, either, especially before breakfast, and once when he came downstairs and found that Muggs had moodily chewed up the morning paper he hit him in the face with a grapefruit and then jumped up on the dining-room table, scattering dishes and silverware and spilling the coffee. Muggs' first free leap carried him all the way across the table and into a brass fire-screen in front of the gas-grate; but he was back on his feet in a moment and in the end he got Roy and gave him a pretty vicious bite in the leg. Then he was all over it; he never bit anyone more than once at a time. Mother always mentioned that as an argument in his favour; she said he had a quick temper, but that he didn't hold a grudge. She was for ever defending him. I think she liked him because he wasn't well. "He's not strong," she would say pityingly, but that was inaccurate. He may not have been well, but he was terribly strong.

One time my mother went to the Chittenden Hotel to call on a woman mental healer who was lecturing in Columbus on the subject of "Harmonious Vibrations". She wanted to find out if it was possible to get harmonious vibrations into a dog. "He's a large tan-coloured Airedale," mother explained. The woman said that she had never treated a dog, but she advised my mother to hold the thought that he did not bite and would not bite. Mother was holding the thought the very next morning when Muggs got the ice-man, but she blamed that slip-up on the ice-man.

"If you didn't think he would bite you, he wouldn't," mother told him. He stomped out of the house in a terrible jangle of vibrations.

One morning when Muggs bit me slightly, more or less in passing, I reached down and grabbed his short stumpy tail and hoisted him into the air. It was a foolhardy thing to do and the last time I saw my mother, about six months ago, she said she didn't know what possessed me. I don't either, except that I was pretty mad. As long as I held the dog off the floor by his tail he couldn't get at me, but he twisted and jerked so, snarling all the time, that I realized I couldn't hold him that way very long. I carried him to the kitchen and

flung him on to the floor and shut the door on him just as he crashed against it. But I forgot about the back stairs. Muggs went up the back stairs and down the front stairs and had me cornered in the living-room. I managed to get up on to the mantelpiece above the fireplace, but it gave way and came down with a tremendous crash, throwing a large marble clock, several vases, and myself heavily to the floor. Muggs was so alarmed by the racket that when I picked myself up he had disappeared. We couldn't find him anywhere, although we whistled and shouted, until old Mrs. Detweiler called after dinner that night. Muggs had bitten her once, in the leg, and she came into the living-room only after we assured her that Muggs had run away. She had just seated herself when, with a great growling and scratching of claws, Muggs emerged from under a davenport where he had been quietly hiding all the time, and bit her again. Mother examined the bite and put arnica on it and told Mrs. Detweiler that it was only a bruise. "He just bumped you," she said. But Mrs. Detweiler left the house in a nasty state of mind.

Lots of people reported our Airedale to the police, but my father held a municipal office at the time and was on friendly terms with the police. Even so, the cops had been out a couple of times—once when Muggs bit Mrs. Rufus Sturtevant and again when he bit Lieutenant-Governor Malloy—but mother told them that it hadn't been Muggs' fault, but the fault of the people who were bitten. "When he starts for them, they scream," she explained, "and that excites him." The cops suggested that it might be a good idea to tie the dog up, but mother said that it mortified him to be tied up and that he wouldn't eat when he was tied up.

Muggs at his meals was an unusual sight. Because of the fact that if you reached towards the floor he would bite you, we usually put his food-plate on top of an old kitchen table with a bench alongside it. Muggs would stand on the bench and eat. I remember that my mother's Uncle Horatio, who boasted that he was the third man up Missionary Ridge, was splutteringly indignant when he found out that we fed the dog on a table because we were afraid to put his plate on the floor. He said he wasn't afraid of any dog that ever lived and that he would put the dog's plate on the floor if we would give it to him. Roy said that if Uncle Horatio had fed Muggs on the ground just before the battle he would have been the

first man up Missionary Ridge. Uncle Horatio was furious. "Bring him in! Bring him in now!" he shouted. "I'll feed the — on the floor!" Roy was all for giving him a chance, but my father wouldn't hear of it. He said that Muggs had already been fed. "I'll feed him again!" bawled Uncle Horatio. We had quite a time quieting him.

In his last year Muggs used to spend practically all of his time outdoors. He didn't like to stay in the house for some reason or other—perhaps it held too many unpleasant memories for him. Anyway, it was hard to get him to come in and as a result the garbage-man, the ice-man, and the laundry-man wouldn't come near the house. We had to haul the garbage down to the corner, take the laundry out and bring it back and meet the ice-man a block from home. After this had gone on for some time we hit on an ingenious arrangement for getting the dog in the house so that we could lock him up while the gas-meter was read, and so on. Muggs was afraid of only one thing—an electrical storm. Thunder and lightning frightened him out of his senses (I think he thought a storm had broken the day the mantelpiece fell). He would rush into the house and hide under a bed or in a clothes-closet. So we fixed up a thunder machine out of a long narrow piece of sheet-iron with a wooden handle on one end. Mother would shake this vigorously when she wanted to get Muggs into the house. It made an excellent imitation of thunder, but I suppose it was the most roundabout system for running a household that was ever devised. It took a lot out of mother.

A few months before Muggs died, he got to "seeing things". He would rise slowly from the floor, growling low, and stalk stiff-legged and menacing towards nothing at all. Sometimes the Thing would be just a little to the right or left of a visitor. Once a Fuller Brush salesman got hysterics. Muggs came wandering into the room like Hamlet following his father's ghost. His eyes were fixed on a spot just to the left of the Fuller Brush man, who stood it until Muggs was about three slow, creeping paces from him. Then he shouted. Muggs wavered on past him into the hall-way grumbling to himself, but the Fuller man went on shouting. I think mother had to throw a pan of cold water on him before he stopped. That was the way she used to stop us boys when we got into fights.

Muggs died quite suddenly one night. Mother wanted to

bury him in the family-lot under a marble stone with some such inscription as "Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest", but we persuaded her it was against the law. In the end we just put up a smooth board above his grave along a lonely road. On the board I wrote with an indelible pencil, "*Cave Canem*". Mother was quite pleased with the simple classic dignity of the old Latin epitaph.

ALLIED INTERESTS



J. D. BERESFORD

J. D. BERESFORD (*b.* 1873) has written, in all, forty-five books. The majority of his novels are touched by a sense of humour, but it is in some of his short stories that he exhibits at its best the irresponsibly light-hearted vein of humour displayed in the story selected for this volume. His first novel was published in 1911; his latest, so far,

ALLIED INTERESTS

JOE WHITLOCK was looked upon as being rather a mug by the members of the office fast set. He did not drink, he did not bet, never went to night-clubs or even a dance-hall, treated all the typists as if they were his maiden aunts, and—so it was rumoured—spent two evenings a week at a boys' club in the East End. Nevertheless, these failings were partly balanced by his athletics, seeing that he was an uncommonly useful member of the office cricket, rowing, and tennis clubs, and a good middle-weight boxer. Hilary West, who was the unquestioned leader of the set that did all the things Joe didn't, pursed his lips over him, shrugged his shoulders, and said that Joe probably had some rotten complex or other, but might be cured if some girl got hold of him—a suggestion that at least a dozen of the typists were always trying to carry into effect, without the least success.

And when one evening a girl did get hold of him, it was not at all in the manner anticipated by Hilary West or anyone else.

Everyone had been working late that evening. The City had been full of rumours all day—chief among them that "Allied Interests, Ltd.," was going phut—and the Stock Exchange had been suffering from a bad fit of nerves. As a consequence, Joe did not leave the office until after seven o'clock, dined lightly on a couple of poached eggs at a café in Leadenhall Street, and, seeing no chance of any other exercise, decided to walk home.

He lived with his mother and an unmarried sister in Willesden, and about a quarter past eight he was passing through one of those respectably disreputable streets that lie round about Marylebone Station. Many of the houses in this neighbourhood have been cut up into cheap but incommodious flats, and it was from the basement of one of these, by way of the area steps, that the figure of the "girl" rather curiously emerged.

Joe saw her head, when he was still some twenty yards away, pushed up just above the level of the stone kerb that supported the dilapidated iron railings, and watching his approach with an effect of nervous tensivity. It was not, even at that distance, an attractive head, presenting as its salient features a shabby old *cloche* hat rammed well down, tortoise-shell-rimmed tinted spectacles and a very large nose—the sort of head that the gayest Lothario would have passed without a second glance.

Certainly Joe's steady observation of this odd figure was not due to its attractiveness, his attention as he approached being held not by the lure of beauty but by the strangeness of the lady's behaviour. She was obviously in two minds about something, looking first at Joe and then up and down the almost empty street, while she first came up a few steps and then hastily ducked down again, only deciding when Joe was within two yards of her to emerge finally and suddenly on to the pavement in front of him.

He was swerving to avoid her when she eagerly caught him by the arm. "Oh, I say!" she said, in a low, anxious voice. "Do you mind if I walk to the end of the street with you?"

Joe did mind. He didn't like the look of the girl at all. He could see now that she was terribly "made up", that great nose particularly being thick with powder. But he had never in all his life been rude to a woman, and was still hesitating in his search for a polite excuse when the grasp that was still being maintained on his arm spasmodically tightened, and the low, anxious voice continued, "Oh, please! Quick!"

The only cause Joe could see for this new urgency was the distant approach of a man in a bowler hat who was coming towards them, staring attentively at every house, and looking down into the areas with an effect of being in a great hurry that was tiresomely impeded by his fear of missing something or someone.

"Quick!" the voice repeated even more urgently; and Joe, still seeking the right words for a delicate refusal of the queer request, found himself a moment later being led at an unexpectedly deliberate pace along Upper Drake Street with a suddenly loquacious woman companion leaning intimately upon his arm.

"But, my dear old thing," she was saying, in a voice that

had now sprung up an octave to an unpleasant shrillness, "there'll be nothing on earth to do if we go home. Why not look in for an hour or two at the Palace in the Edgware Road? They've got rather a good programme this week." By this time they were nearly up to the man in the bowler hat, who was staring at the strange woman with an intentness that her attractions did not warrant; and her voice was a trifle more strident even than before as she continued: "After all, I didn't marry you to sit at home seven evenings a week. And there's no reason that I can see why we shouldn't have a little pleasure now and then. It's no good pretending that we can't afford it, is it, now? Oh, do say something, instead of walking along like an I-don't-know-what. One would think I'd asked you to take me to the Ritz or something instead of..."

Her voice fell slowly in pitch after they had passed the inquisitive stranger, and Joe was aware that she was with great difficulty checking a strong impulse to quicken her pace. He had realized by now that the poor thing was quite mad and was wondering what he ought to do about it. Could one, for instance, go up to the first policeman one met, say, "This lady is dangerously insane," and give her in charge? He was rejecting that means of escape as at once cowardly and discourteous when she spoke again, this time on her lower register, which was distinctly pleasing and musical.

"I say, could you just look over your shoulder and see whether he's following us?" she said.

Joe felt that he was committing himself to an alliance into which he had no wish to enter, but did as he was asked. "He's standing still, looking after us," he reported.

"Oh, God! He's probably guessed. Come on," the strange lady commented, in that engaging lower voice of hers, and now very noticeably quickened her pace. "Look round again when we reach the Marylebone Road," she continued, "and if he's following us we must just bolt for the nearest taxi. . . ."

All very well, of course; but if this fellow was her keeper or something, had he any right to aid and abet her in making an escape? Joe reflected. And the more he considered that, as, with the madwoman still embracing his arm, they scurried on the verge of a run for the Marylebone Road, the more certain he became that he wanted to have nothing more to do

with her—although how he was to free himself without physical violence he did not know.

Unfortunately the luck was all against him, for as they reached the end of Drake Street he looked round again to find that the man in the bowler hat was coming after them at a run, and Fate—who surely should have known better—had stopped a taxi right in front of them at the near kerb.

“Quick, quick ; get in !” the madwoman urged him ; and Joe, momentarily hypnotized into sharing her fear of pursuit, dived into the taxi as if the police were after him, followed precipitously by the lady with the large nose, who hardly paused to fling the direction, “Anywhere, only go like hell !” to the cheerfully acquiescent driver.

Joe’s last hope of being rescued at that moment rested with the lady’s pursuer. He was coming up Drake Street at a fine pace, and when he saw the evidence of a proposed flight by taxi, cried out fiercely to the driver to stop, following that with what Joe understood to be a desperate though distinctly breathless appeal addressed to “Miss Harrison”. And if the driver had hesitated, all might still have been well for Joe—who would greatly have preferred the charge of being concerned in the abduction of a lunatic to the further prosecution of that repulsive task. But the driver, either because he was an accomplice posted there for the purpose or because he had some misguided notion of sportsmanship, got off the mark and into top gear with a despatch that spoke well both for his engine and his own skill.

After that there was for the time being not a solitary hope for Joe. The streets were comparatively empty at that time of the evening, and the taxi-driver—who had evidently entered into the spirit of the escape—got across the Edgware Road into Oxford and Cambridge Terrace without a check, and from there his way was clear to plunge at top speed into the desolate heart of Bayswater.

They were in the neighbourhood of Leinster Gardens before a single word was exchanged between the mad lady and Joe. Immediately on entering the taxi she had sat forward and buried her nose in her hands, and Joe was for a time too deep in the consideration of how to disentangle himself from this ghastly escapade to attempt conversation.

It was, indeed, the lady who first broke into speech. She dropped her hands, sat up, did something with a very small

handkerchief under the tinted glasses which so effectively concealed her eyes, and then said, "I'm sure I don't know what you can think of me."

There was, as a matter of fact, only one thing Joe could think ; but he didn't care to say it—more particularly when his ugly companion spoke in that soft, appealing voice.

"Well, it's a bit unusual, all this, of course," he replied stiffly, turning his shoulder to her and gazing steadfastly out of the window.

"Unusual !" She gave a little sniff that had a sound of despair in it ; but Joe did not turn round. He was afraid to give her the least encouragement. Heaven only knew what she might do next if he showed the least sign of friendliness. He had heard that these repulsively ugly women, who were debarred by nature from the love and admiration of men, sometimes . . . But never mind that.

"If you only knew how unusual," she continued, raising her voice a trifle to make herself heard above the multitudinous noises of the racing taxi, and added, "But you do realize, surely, that I must have been pretty desperate to accost a perfect stranger like that ?"

Joe found that when he was not looking at her her voice and words sounded not only rational, but quite distinctly appealing. He knew that he could disperse that illusion at any moment by just turning round, but he preferred the dream to the reality. He had a queer feeling that if the lady with the nose had had an altogether different appearance, this horrible escapade might have been rather good fun.

"Oh yes, I suppose there must have been some reason for it," he admitted, with a weak inclination to persuade himself that she might not, after all, be so very mad.

"There was," she affirmed, with the suggestion of a break in that persuasive voice. "The truth is that I was—still am, I suppose—in a beastly mess—a jolly dangerous mess too, I'm afraid."

Joe stiffened slightly, and pulled himself together. This was obviously no time for dreaming. Before he knew where he was, she'd have made up some pathetic story and be dragging *him* into this dangerous mess, whatever it was. Well, there was an obvious defence against any temptation to become weak and sentimental. All he had to do was to look at her, and the sooner the better.

But when he applied this drastic remedy he did not find quite what he had expected. The *cloche* hat was in the lady's lap with her tinted spectacles inside it, revealing dark hair that came back from a low forehead with a deliciously pretty wave; and her eyes were brown and bright, yet with an effect of tenderness that may have been due to the thickness of the curly black lashes.

Joe blinked and concentrated his gaze fiercely on that gaunt and shapeless projection of the nose, the only parallel to which, that he had ever seen, was in the case of an old man suffering from acromegaly.

The lady blushed brightly through her make-up and hid the horrid excrescence with her hands. "Don't," she pleaded.

"I'm sorry," Joe apologized, and dropped his eyes.

"And, after all, it didn't work," the lady lamented. "Miller must have known me. I suppose the truth is that I overdid it. Oh, curse the thing!" And with that the lady unhappily went mad again, starting most horribly to pinch large lumps out of her nose and throw them on the floor of the taxi.

Joe stared in a paralysis of horror and dismay, and with an expression of such utter bewilderment that the lady paused in her awful act of self-laceration, to say, with a little gurgle of laughter, "It's only 'nasanket', you know. The wax they use on the stage and in the films for make-up. Oh, have you got such a thing as a decent-sized handkerchief? Now I've made a start I may as well get clean again."

Joe had a handkerchief, proffered it, and then—with a strong presentiment that whatever mess this girl was in he was going to be in too, up to the neck—watched the final transfiguration of the repulsive figure that had accosted him in Upper Drake Street into quite the most attractive young woman he had ever spoken to. Even the gestures with which, leaning forward to examine herself in the narrow mirror of the taxi, she removed the last signs of theatrical make-up from her face, were deliciously feminine and thrilling.

"You see," she explained, as she deftly pinched and then wiped away the last signs of the horrid disfigurement she had used to conceal a dear little nose that was admirably in keeping with the rest of her features, "the friend I've just gone to share a flat with is on the films, and if she'd been at home she'd have made me up properly. But I'm only a ghastly amateur; and I can see now that anyone as sharp as Miller is would see

through it—though it took him just long enough as it was to give us a start, didn't it? I think my talk put him off, don't you? I really did do that rather well, although I have made such a ghastly muddle of all the rest of the business. I lost my head, of course. But who wouldn't?"

"Who wouldn't?" Joe echoed helplessly, watching the now almost perfectly reconstructed Miss Harrison.

"You see," she explained, knitting her brows and apparently talking as much for her own benefit as for his, "my first idea was to make a bolt for home and talk it over with Nora—that's the friend I've just gone to share a flat with. And when I found a note from her saying she'd been called to a rehearsal and probably wouldn't be back until the small hours, I began to think. At first I kidded myself it would be all right, because I'd just moved in and they hadn't got my new address at the office, and then I remembered that I'd pointed the place out to Clara Day—she's one of our girls—about a week ago, and that though she'd almost certainly have forgotten the number she'd be sure to remember the sort of curtains we'd got and things like that; and it was a dead cert that Mr. Flescherman would get on to it as soon as he'd heard I'd done a bolt.

"And then," she continued, returning a very soiled handkerchief to Joe and looking appealingly in his face, "I got panicky. Frightfully panicky. (I shouldn't wipe my face with that, if I were you; some of it may come off.) So I decided to disguise myself and go and tell the whole story to one of the directors. Really, I did think that out rather well—because, you see, if I'd just gone to Lord Flitmore's house and Mr. Flescherman or someone from the office happened to be there, I'd probably be in the soup. You follow all that, don't you?"

"Yes. Oh yes, I think so," Joe said. "Only what——"

"Only then, I must admit, my nerve went a bit," Miss Harrison went on, overlooking the suggestion of Joe's tentative question. "And when I saw you coming you looked so solid and trustworthy somehow that I thought you wouldn't mind coming with me to the end of the street. I felt, you know, as if I must have someone to protect me. Idiotic, of course, but I *am* a fool! I am, really Mr. Flescherman's told me so heaps of times."

"I say, by the way," Joe put in, "is that Oscar Flescherman of——"

But his question was interrupted by the action of the taxi-driver who, looking dangerously over his shoulder, made a brief but pregnant gesture rearward.

"Oh God! We're being followed!" exclaimed Miss Harrison in a tone of anguish, looking out of the back window. "That's Miller, of course. I might have known he'd pick up our tracks somehow. Now what shall we do?"

Joe, getting one eye to the backflap in thrilling proximity to the dark hair that grew so prettily from Miss Harrison's forehead, had to admit that it certainly did look as if they were being chased. They were passing through the remote silences of Holland Park now, but heading straight for Shepherd's Bush, where even at this time of the evening there would inevitably be too much traffic to maintain their present headlong speed. But before he could proffer any advice there was at least one thing he must know.

"Look here, Miss Harrison," he said, "who *is* Miller?"

"The office sleuth," she said. "He does all kinds of dirty work for us, and he's most frightfully cute. I guessed they'd put him on to me."

"But why, exactly, are you running away?" Joe persisted.

"Oh, that's a long story!" was the evasive reply. "We shall be caught long before I could explain all that."

"But—but you haven't—done anything?" Joe stammered.

"Oh, haven't I just!" returned Miss Harrison with an expressive droop of her mouth.

"Dangerous?" Joe asked anxiously; but at that moment the driver of their taxi suddenly jammed on his brakes with a violence that threw the unprepared occupants on to the floor of the cab, and all the answer Joe received was the beginning of another grimace that hinted at something very dangerous indeed.

There was no accident, though there ought to have been, for one of those many idiotic people who ought to have their licences cancelled had swerved at twenty miles an hour out of a side-turning without even a solitary toot of warning, and by the time Joe and Miss Harrison had ruefully picked themselves up, Mr. Miller was alongside, had leapt out of his own taxi and opened the door of theirs.

"Now, really, Miss Harrison," he was saying, "what is the meaning of all this?"

For answer the lady addressed looked up at Joe, put her hand on his arm, and with a piteous look and something very like a whimper said, "You won't leave me, will you?"

"Rather not!" returned Joe valiantly. He had always before been horribly shy in women's company, but on this most unusual occasion he felt as bold as a lion.

"I don't think we've met before," Miller continued, turning to Joe. "Won't you introduce us, Miss Harrison?"

"My name is Joseph Whitlock," Joe put in promptly to save Miss Harrison the embarrassment of confessing that she didn't know his name. He was prepared, was in fact quite eager, to be rude to Mr. Miller, to whom he had taken a violent dislike. He had summed him up at once as one of those clever fellows who can never run straight—a type with which he was familiar in embryo at his East End boys' club.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Whitlock," commented Miller dryly. "And now, Miss Harrison, are you going to be sensible and come back with me to Mr. Flescherman's?"

"Oh, not likely!" returned Miss Harrison with a shiver of horror.

By this time the two taxi-drivers had got down and were listening with evident enjoyment. One or two casual passers-by had materialized out of what had been an apparently empty street, and the group was finally completed by a deliberate policeman, who strolled up as if he knew they were all waiting for him, and opened the new movement by saying: "Now, then, what's all this?"

It was Miller who answered him with just a hint of suavity. "Nothing serious, officer. Only an employee who has made a slight error of judgment and refuses to put it right."

"The man or the woman?" the policeman demanded, peering into the taxi in which Joe and Miss Harrison still sat side by side.

"The woman—Miss Eva Harrison—employed by 'Allied Interests' as stenographer and typist," Mr. Miller said. "She left the office early without permission this evening, and Mr. Flescherman, the chairman of the company, sent me to find her as she is needed in connection with a very urgent inquiry."

The policeman had automatically pulled out his note-book when Miller began his recital, and he now made a note by the light of the street lamp of the numbers of the two taxi-drivers

before putting his head again to the window of the taxi and saying : "Well, miss, why don't you go ?"

"Oh, I couldn't !" Miss Harrison explained, and slipped her hand into Joe's with an entreating pressure that said again quite clearly, "You won't leave me, will you ?"

"And where do you come in, if I may ask ?" the policeman continued, looking at Joe, who on the inspiration of the moment rose to heights that even Hilary West might have balked at and said : "Miss Harrison and I are engaged to be married."

What he was committing himself to he did not know. It might be to complicity in that dangerous something which Miss Harrison had done, a something that might, he was beginning to be sorely afraid, land her (and him) in a police-cell. But the sudden ecstatic squeeze of the little hand that applauded his splendid lie seemed to him just then a reward that would have braced him to face penal servitude without regret.

"Oh, are you !" remarked the policeman, with perhaps the faintest tinge of envy in his voice. "Well, I don't see as I can do anything."

But in the interval Mr. Miller had been thinking, and now took a fresh hold of the situation by saying : "Well, no, not perhaps at present, officer. All the same, unless this young lady comes to her senses pretty quick, I may need your help."

"How's that ?" the policeman asked, reopening his notebook.

"Well, there is a pretty strong suspicion against her," Mr. Miller continued, looking very straightly at Miss Harrison, "of being involved in certain defalcations in the company's petty-cash accounts."

"Defalcations, eh ?" the constable commented with a low whistle.

"Yes," Mr. Miller replied firmly, "and although I bring no charge against her at present, I can only repeat that she would be well advised, from every point of view, to come with me to Mr. Flescherman's private house."

"It's all lies, you know," Miss Harrison put in, addressing the policeman. "I've never had anything whatever to do with the petty cash."

"Then might I ask, Miss Harrison," snapped Mr. Miller in a very nasty voice, "why you disguised yourself in a false nose and spectacles, dashed into a taxi when I tried to speak to

you, and raced half across London before I could catch you?"

"Disguise!" murmured the constable, pushing his face right into the taxi. "That ain't a false nose you got now, anyway."

"Here! I call this man as a witness," said Mr. Miller, laying his hand on the policeman's shoulder in the effort to disengage his attention from Miss Harrison's nose.

"Where did you pick up the fare, then?" the policeman inquired, reluctantly withdrawing from the taxi to cross-examine Joe's driver.

"Top o' Drake Street," was the reply. "I'd just set down my last fare when I see the two of 'em comin' up the street in rather a 'urry with another feller, this one 'ere, I suppose it was, runnin' after 'em. Well, the young lady pushes the young feller—'im in there, and I don't blame 'im neither—into the cab and says to me, 'Get on, like 'ell, anywhere', or words to that effect, so I got on."

"And was the young lady disguised?" put in Mr. Miller sharply.

The driver took off his cap, scratched his head, gave a glance into his taxi, and then said with the air of one who is conscious of a slight disloyalty but does not want to have his licence endorsed, "Not 'alf she wasn't. She 'ad a beak on her like the old Dook o' Wellington, and naturally supposin' it was some kind of elopement, I thought to meself as if I were in the young feller's place I'd have let the 'usband or whatever he was catch me. 'Ad the surprise of me life when I see 'er first like she is now."

"Well, officer, are you convinced?" Mr. Miller demanded.

"It looks uncommon suspicious, I must say," the policeman admitted with a reproachful glance in the direction of the taxi.

"Well, now, Miss Harrison," Miller said firmly, coming back to the window, "don't you think that you'd better be sensible and come with me?"

But a change had come over Miss Harrison in the last minute. She had released Joe's hand. She was sitting forward with an effect of having seen her way out, and her eyes were very bright as she leaned boldly out of the window and said to the policeman: "Look here, you! What'll you do if I say that nothing would ever induce me to go with this man?"

"Might have to charge you, you know," he said.

"Take me to the police-station?" she demanded eagerly.

"That's it."

"Oh God! What a little fool I am!" Miss Harrison exclaimed. "What a fool! Why ever didn't I think of that before!" Then with an effect of making tardy reparation she turned back to Joe and added, "Of course you'll come too?"

"Me? Oh, rather!" Joe assented in the cheerful voice of one who has been invited to a jolly party.

It was Mr. Miller only who seemed to disapprove of the new proposition. "Now, now, Miss Harrison, don't lose your head," he urged her. "If you'll come with me, I can give you Mr. Flescherman's guarantee that you won't lose by it. You can guess what I mean," he went on, thrusting his head right through the window and dropping his voice to a whisper. "Play your cards properly, you little fool, and you're made for life."

"What a hope!" returned Miss Harrison, shrinking away from Miller to the great advantage of Joe, who could not have avoided this delightful pressure even if he had wanted to do such an unlikely thing, and added: "No, thanks, Mr. Miller. I may be a fool, I'm always being told so, but I'm not such a fool as all that."

"Well, you've damned well got to!" snarled Miller, who was fast losing his temper.

And then Miss Harrison had her second bright idea of the evening. "Hit him, Joe," she whispered, being at the moment in an ideal position for whispering. "Hit him hard, and then they'll *have* to run us in."

To which instruction Joe, ordinarily the most peaceable of men, but just then in a condition of the wildest exhilaration, responded with a promptitude that did more credit to his physical training than to his good sense. He did not, it is true, hit Mr. Miller's ugly face as hard as he would have liked to do, because he was considerably involved by the charming person of Miss Harrison, but he hit it hard enough to knock it completely out of the taxi.

It was the policeman who saved Mr. Miller from falling backwards on to the pavement. "Well, you got 'em now, all right," he advised him, not without a hint of regret in his voice. "Charge of assault and battery, and I'm a witness."

"Oh, all right!" Mr. Miller growled savagely, stanching the

blood that was beginning to flow from his nose. "Where's the nearest police-station?"

"Shepherd's Bush. Not more'n half a mile," the policeman told him. "I'd better go in the taxi with 'em. You can follow us in the other."

Whereat the two drivers awoke with an air of new alertness to the call of duty, and within thirty seconds the first taxi was under way again, obviously to the intense disappointment of the large crowd of onlookers that had been steadily accumulating for the past ten minutes.

The short drive to the police-station was accomplished in silence. The policeman, sitting stiffly erect on the lift-up seat, had no doubt official reasons for keeping quiet, and Joe, now that the inevitable goal of the evening's entertainment was in full sight, was just beginning to wonder if he had not after all justified Hilary West's opinion and proved himself rather a mug. Heaven alone knew what he had let himself in for, and what his mother and sister, not to mention his chief at the office, would say if he were charged with, at the best, an unprovoked assault on the innocent Mr. Miller, and at the worst, as being an accomplice to a young woman who had done, well, "something dangerous".

The taxi drew up on the off-side of the road and Joe was the first to get out. He had the taxi to pay, did it generously with a ten-shilling note, and received the driver's cheery blessing. Then he turned back to find the policeman and Miss Harrison standing on the pavement, but as yet no sign of Mr. Miller.

"Funny thing," commented the policeman. "I took it for granted he was follering."

"Following? Following us, do you mean?" ejaculated Miss Harrison. "Not something likely! He knows better than that. Come on. Let's go inside."

"But I can't take you into custody if there's no one to charge you," the policeman explained.

Miss Harrison's face fell. "Oh, but you *must*!" she implored. "I—we've given ourselves up."

"You can make a statement to the inspector on duty, of course," the policeman suggested helpfully.

"Oh lord, yes! I never thought of that. Come on. I'll make a statement all right. It's just what I've been wanting to do ever since five o'clock this afternoon."

Miss Harrison's "statement" to the Inspector, made a few minutes later, had not, however, anything whatever to do with Joe's assault on Mr. Miller. She prefaced it with the admission that she must be a fool because Mr. Flescherman was always telling her so, but her story did not fully confirm Mr. Flescherman's opinion.

"I'm in 'Allied Interests', you know," she began, "and this afternoon I had to attend the special Board Meeting that had been called to discuss the question of reconstruction. We're on the rocks, of course—everyone in the City knows that; but the boss has got a way of pulling things off somehow, and we all thought he might do it again. Only he hasn't. Well, I ought to tell you to begin with that the boss, Mr. Flescherman, always sits with his hands in front of him on the table when anyone else is speaking, tapping with his fingers, and this afternoon I suddenly noticed that he was talking Morse to someone. I went into the Post Office when I was sixteen, so I'm pretty quick at that game, and I'll swear he'd never done it before or I should have spotted it. But today, while old Lord Flitmore was insisting that certain accounts of ours must be laid before the Board at the next meeting, I happened to be watching the boss's hands, and suddenly it came to me that he was spelling out a message, right hand for dot and left for dash. It was as clear as anything if you're used to Morse. I don't know what he'd tapped out before I spotted him, but I got 'All UP. Clear out sharp.' And then I looked round the Board table and saw that Mr. Hackle and Mr. Parelos were watching his hands too, like cats at a mouse-hole.

"Well, I've told you what a fool I am, and I got so interested that I never thought what I was doing until, after a bit more tapping that didn't make anything, I found the boss was spelling out my own name, Eva Harrison. Even then I just wondered what was coming until I realized how he was looking at me."

She paused there and gave a short sigh of dismay. "Phew!" she remarked. "I went cold all over, and when the meeting was finished about half an hour later, and the boss told me to go straight to his room and wait for him there, I fairly got the wind up and did a bolt. Silly, perhaps, but if you knew what the boss is like, I expect you'd have got the wind up too. He's so clever, I'm scared to death of him. We all are. And when

I realized that he knew I could give him right away if he didn't do something pretty awful to stop me—well . . .”

“What do you mean exactly by giving Mr. Flescherman away, Miss Harrison?” the Inspector inquired.

“My goodness, that's clear enough, isn't it?” she replied gaily. “He's been playing hanky with the company and he's going to clear out sharp for dear old Europe before the next meeting. Now then, please, Mr. Inspector, do you mind locking me up for the night, because, really, I don't feel that my life's safe.”

“Very sorry, very sorry indeed, Miss Harrison, but we can't keep you here,” the Inspector returned sadly. “We've got nothing against you, you know.”

Miss Harrison's mouth drooped, and then her eye fell on Joe, and she brightened up again. “Haven't you got a mother or something you live with?” she asked hopefully.

“A mother and a sister,” Joe acknowledged.

“Well, couldn't you . . .?” she inquired elliptically.

And Joe, after five seconds of intensive thought, nodded his head.

“And if Mr. Miller gets after us again?”

“I'll deal with him,” Joe said firmly.

Everyone knows, now, that Flescherman and his accomplices, deprived of the fortnight's start they had hopefully counted upon, were arrested in Antwerp and after the usual delay brought to trial. But few people are aware of the fact that on the basis of allied interests a new partnership was formed that same summer, the two principals reciting the articles of their agreement before the Rev. Arthur Bateson and some fifty or sixty other witnesses at the parish church of St. Luke the Evangelist, Willesden.

